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FOLK TALES OF MAHARASHTRA

INDUMATI SHEOREY



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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

India has a legacy of rich and varied folklore. While research in ancient and modern history has been directed in recent decades more to the political shifts, little notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people. The sociologists should pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and to changes therein through the ages. They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people. There has always been an easy mobility of folklore through pilgrimages, *melas* and fairs. The wandering minstrels, *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them. People of the north visiting the temples of the south and vice-versa carry their folk tales, songs, riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration. The *dharmasalas*, inns and the *chattis* (places where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales, traditional songs and riddles. That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions. The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with slight regional variation. These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing.

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore. Max Mueller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature-myths. Sir L. Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore. But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him, old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man. That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown.

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin. This is all the more regrettable because the

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Panchatantra stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world. As late as in 1859, T. Benfey held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe. The same stories with different twists and settings have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories delight our children. That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of the dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnall and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India.

What is the secret of the fascination that the folk tales hold for the old, the young and the very young? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest. This is due to the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales. The tales through fantasies, make-believe and credulous acceptance helped primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him. We have an element of primitiveness in our minds in spite of the advancement of science around us. Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales like the one about the moon being swallowed, causing lunar eclipse. Through the folk tales man exercised his imagination and somehow or other we would like to retain that practice even when we have grown up. The advancement in science can never banish the folk tales. On the other hand, folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity of men. In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place, the old, the young and children would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of a great snake and when the snake is tired with its weight, it shakes the hood and there is an earthquake. Among the Mundas, an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the constellation, Orion. The sword and belt of Orion, the Mundas imagined, form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough-share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth how to use the plough and the plough-share. It is further said in the Munda folk tale that

while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough-share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance. The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag the game. He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove's head and hung on a tree. The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resemble a hammer. The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of the Hyades are the eggs of the dove. Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these constellations.

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops. The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust-storms and stories are woven round them. But nothing is more satisfying as a folk tale than the explanation of the phases of the stars, the moon and the sun. A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora*, i.e. the path of the cows. The *Sing Bonga* God leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd. The dust raised by the cows sends down the rain. A story of this type can never fail to sustain interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies.

The 'why' and 'wherefore' of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom. Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits. The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle. The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift, sleek and intelligent. The slow-going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him. Monkeys are very close to man. The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd. The tortoise is slow-going but sure-footed. The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road. These characteristics of the common animals are acceptable even today. Similarly, a large and shady peepal tree is naturally associated with the abode of the sylvan god. The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits. Any solitary hut in the heart of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or

uncanny. These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why and how of the mind. Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque. The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category. There is nothing to be surprised at that. Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although they are a very good index of the social developments of a particular time.

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself. The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales. The day-to-day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales. Parental love, family happiness, children's adventurous habits, love and fear of the unknown, greed, etc. are some of the usual themes of folk tales. The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for. He dreams of riches, princes, kingdoms, etc. and finds satisfaction in stories and fantasy. Men love gossip and scandal. Women cannot keep secrets, children will love their parents, a mother-in-law will always think the daughter-in-law needs advice—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life. The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the day-to-day life, the joys and sorrows of the common man.

Unknowingly, the folklorists bring in the religious customs, beliefs, food habits, modes of dress, superstitions, etc. and thereby leave a picture of the culture-complex of the region and its people. A tribal story does not picture a king riding a large, white, foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar*. In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it to feed his cows, but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces, liveried-servants, ministers and courtiers in the king's court. The very fact that the folk tales have woven man, nature, animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and singular development of mind. Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after-thought but came in as a very natural development.

The time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different. It is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful. As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness in the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be, being a replica of life.

These beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations from different parts of India. Our present run of grandmothers know very few of these tales. The professional story-tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young, not to speak of the children, have almost completely disappeared from India. The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore.

Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 21 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions. The work was entrusted to specially selected writers who had an intimate knowledge of their regions. The regional elements of the stories have been sought to be preserved as far as possible. The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents. We expect the reader to experience the atmosphere of different regions after reading the various folk tales. We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folk retire in wintry nights with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy a gossip, their love for highly spiced meaty food. We want him to appreciate the splendour of colours in the sari and the flowers that are a must in Tamil Nadu.

We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South such as the Kanjeevaram temple. We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple. We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles. We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the

lap of the Kumaon hills. We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with its *Alpana* and *Bratas*. At the same time we want the reader to know the customs and manners of the Santhals, Garos, and the other tribes inhabiting NEFA and Assam.

The publishers want to have a miniature India in these volumes of folk tales of the different regions of India. It is an ambitious project. The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work. I am sure they have enjoyed the assignments. It is hoped that the books will be found useful and interesting to the public. I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make up a miniature India. It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know a little of each region and its people.

P.C. Roy Chaudhury

PREFACE

Maharashtra has a hoary past. References to Vidarbha, one of its ancientmost regions, are found even in the Vedas! Legendary heroines like Lord Krishna's wife Rukmini, Aja's wife Indumati, Damayanti, Lopamudra the wife of sage Agasthya were all daughters of the Vidarbha kings. It is said that the valiant warrior-sage Parashurama had settled in 'Aparanta' now identified as 'Konkan'.

The boundaries of Maharashtra at one time had extended from the western coast to the end of Balaghat ranges in the east, from Narmada in the north, up to Maharashtra and Tanjore in the south. There is also a marked variety of its people.

The area has various Adivasi tribes like Gond, Korku, Bhil, Kolam, Laman, Warli, Katkari, Koli, Banjara, etc. It has many holy places and famous temples. The region of Goa is picturesque.

We have a variety of Adivasi myths and legends, traditional mythological stories told by 'Gondhalis' and 'Kirtankars', stories about temples and popular deities like Vithoba, Khandoba, Bhawani, Mangesha and Jyotirlingas of Shiva, historical legends of the brave Maratha warriors and kings sung in 'Powadas' stories, tales with a Christian background, fairy and nursery tales told by the grandmothers.

The oldest form of the Marathi folk tale which is available in the written form is that of a fable of "The Crow and a Sparrow", narrated in *Leelacharitra*, the biography of the founder of 'Mahanubhav' sect, Chakradhar Swami. It is also perhaps the first story that a Maharashtrian mother tells her child.

Apart from the myths, legends, fairytales, fables and parables—the main varieties of folk tales—Maharashtra has another type of its own, known as *Kahani* which is distinct from the other types. It is a religious story woven round deities and their festivals, prescribing various forms of religious

rituals and worships. Its purpose is to inculcate love for the family traditions, sense of duty, piety and other virtues among the young girls. These *Kahanis* are said to have been composed by women and are rightly called *Apaurusheya*, i.e. not written by 'men'. The *Kahani* usually begins with "Once there was an Aat-Paat-Nagar."

The city is, of course, fictitious. Two such stories "Sampat Friday", and "Mangala Gouri" have been retold in this book.

One of the prominent characteristics of the Marathi folk tales is their love for miracles. Here gods, goddesses and fairies often help the poor and the miserable. They readily give boons. Even demons are sometimes kind. Another feature is the regard for honour. Some tribal stories, specially the stories of the Gond tribe are noted for their sense of honour, as also for their serene and pathetic quality.

Folk tales travel from place to place by word of mouth. They have some common motifs, but the tales always reflect the local colour and nuances of particular regions.

I have tried to make this book as representative as possible of the state. A lot of research in folk literature has been done in Maharashtra by scholars like Dr Sarojini Babar, Dr Iravati Karve, Durgawati Bhagwat, V.V. Joshi, Sane Guruji, V.K. Ghorghade, S.G. Date and others. The State of Maharashtra has a "Loksahitya Samiti" for research on folklore. Their works have been very useful. I owe a special gratitude to Dr Babar and B.B. Borker who helped me in collecting the folk stories from Goa.

Indumati Sheorey

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**FOLK TALES
OF
MAHARASHTRA**

FIVE CRAFTSMEN

ONCE upon a time there lived five friends in a town. One was a carpenter, the other a weaver, the third a goldsmith, the fourth a bangle-seller and the fifth a brahmin—well-versed in ancient sacred lore. As they were starving in their town they decided to go to some other land to seek fortune.

One morning they collected the tools and materials of their trade, took leave of the members of their families and set out on their journey. In the evening they came to a thick forest where they could not find their way in the pitch dark. So they decided to rest there for the night. They selected a spot under a large banyan tree close to a sparkling rivulet. The breeze was gentle and the full moon was rising above the horizon. They found the place very enchanting.

With the day's walking they were all tired and anxious to retire for the night. But one of them queried: "What happens if a tiger comes when we are all asleep?" The brahmin in his wisdom came forth with a solution and suggested: "We will take turns in keeping vigil. This way every one of us will get the necessary rest." All of them welcomed the suggestion. The brahmin then declared the order for keeping guard thus: first the carpenter, then the weaver, followed by the goldsmith, the bangle-seller and lastly the brahmin.

All except the carpenter retired. With the gentle breeze, the rising moon, and the shimmer of

the sparkling stream the carpenter was simply bewitched. He asked himself : "How should I keep myself engaged during the watch ?"

An idea came to him like a flash. Why not carve a beautiful wooden statue of a young woman? In no time, he took out his tools, hacked a log of wood and perched himself on a table-top rock. He worked like one inspired and soon sculpted the statue of an exceedingly beautiful woman. He was thrilled by his creation. He picked up the statue gently and placed it resting against the trunk of the banyan tree. Then he woke the weaver to take his turn and went to sleep.

The weaver woke up rubbing his eyes to drive away sleep. His gaze was soon arrested by the statue. "What a piece of loveliness ! But alas, she is nude. She must be clothed." So he took out his tools and a hank of gossamer silk and with utmost skill he wove a dreamlike sari and choli for the statue. Then he clothed the statue, stood it resting against the tree-trunk, and woke the goldsmith whose turn now it was to keep guard.

The goldsmith too, like his friends, was amazed by the beauty of the statue. But he felt sad that it had no ornaments. So he immediately took out his tools and fashioned a few ornaments of exquisite design, adorned the statue with loving care and placed it against the trunk of the tree. It was now the turn of the bangle-seller to keep watch.

The moon was now overhead. When the bangle-seller saw the lovely statue he cried in amazement : "What beauty ! What form !! But alas !!! She has no kumkum, no *mangalasutra*, and no glass bangles on her delicate wrists. An Indian woman is incomplete without these." So he created a set of bangles and a *mangalasutra* and put them on the statue. This done, he wondered what to do

about the red *kumkun* mark for the forehead ? All of a sudden he got an inspiration. He slit his finger with a sharp knife and put the auspicious vermilion mark on the statue's forehead with his blood and placed it resting against the tree.

He then woke the brahmin for his turn. Since day-break was not far away, the brahmin went to the stream, took his bath while chanting the mantras and came to the rock to keep vigil. Inevitably, his gaze was drawn by the statue. He went near it and said in ecstasy : "Ah ! What beauty !! What charm !!! But alas, it is lifeless. It is a matter of great sorrow that such a piece of beauty should be without life." He placed the statue on the rock, and started chanting *mantras* and sprinkling water over it till almost day-break. There was suddenly a stir in the air and the statue came to life.

He was dazzled by the heavenly beauty of the twenty-year old young maiden. He could hardly take his eyes from her. Since it was almost day-break, the four friends had arisen from their sleep one by one. When they saw the maiden, everyone wished she could be his wife. The maiden sat still witnessing the quarrel with a smile on her lips.

The carpenter, raising his eyebrows and flourishing his arms in the air, said with great agitation : "The idea of carving the statue was mine. Had I not created the statue, this question would not have cropped up at all. So it is my right to have her as my wife."

The weaver did not lag behind in vehemence. He said : "You made the statue no doubt, but it was nude. So I clothed her with exquisite garments. It is but just that I should wed this maiden."

The goldsmith with clenched fists shouted : "Enough of this empty boasting about creating the

statue and clothing it. One cannot think of woman without ornaments. So I, and none else, has the right to marry her."

The bangle-seller, looking intently at his friends, asserted: "I have given her the accepted marks of marriage by slipping bangles round her wrists, tying *mangalasutra* round her neck and putting a vermilion mark on her forehead with my own blood. So should I not marry her?"

The brahmin boiling with rage intervened: "You are all fools!; who did what is immaterial. After all, the statue was without life. Had it remained so, all your claims for the maiden's hand would have been meaningless. By the power of my *mantras* I infused life in the statue. So she is rightfully mine."

But not one of them was prepared to yield to the other. From hot words they came to blows. Seeing no way out, the carpenter suggested: "Let us go to God Brahma and request him to decide the matter for us. We should accept whatever decision he gives." They all agreed to this suggestion.

And in no time a furious storm began to rage in the forest with blinding flashes of lightning. They saw an old farmer coming to them, with a staff in his hand. Impressed by his divine aura, they realised that God Brahma himself had come to them in the garb of a farmer. They all ran to him and bowed.

The farmer seated himself on the rock and beckoned the young woman to come and sit by his side. Then turning to the five friends he asked: "Why are you quarrelling like this?"

They then narrated their stories.

After hearing them all he turned solemnly to the carpenter and asked:

"Well, carpenter, you say you made the statue. What exactly did you do?"

"I brought the statue in existence."

"So, how is the giver of the birth related to the born?"

"He will be the father, Sir."

"So you are her father, is it not?"

"Yes, Sir."

The farmer then turned to the weaver and asked: "Well, good man, you provided the young woman with *sari* and *choli*. What does it actually mean?"

"Sir, I protected her virtue."

"Alright. How will the protector of a maiden's virtue be related to her?"



"He will be her brother, Sir."

"So you are her brother."

It was now the turn of the goldsmith. The farmer asked him :

"What does a maternal uncle do for his niece on the occasion of her marriage ?"

"He presents her with ornaments."

"Then, you giver of ornaments, how are you related to her ?"

"As her maternal uncle, Sir."

The farmer then asked the bangle-seller the significance of his act. The bangle-seller said : "She was a virgin. By bestowing on her the marriage tokens I gave her the status of a married woman."

Sensing the trend of the verdict the brahmin intervened in desperation : "Sir, this is injustice. The statue was an inanimate object. I injected life into it."

"Calm down, oh brahmin," the farmer observed. "It does not behave a brahmin to lose his balance so easily. Now, in giving it life, what did you do ?"

"I used all my craft in infusing life and knowledge into her."

"So, how is a giver of knowledge related to her ?"

"As her Guru, Sir."

The farmer then gave his verdict : "Since, the bangle-seller has given her the symbols of a marital status he is her rightful husband."

All the friends were impressed by the wisdom of the old farmer and accepted his decision with joy.

They then bowed down to touch the feet of the farmer and when they raised their heads they found that he had disappeared.

2

RUPEE TREE

AT Aat-Pat-Nagar* there lived a brahmin. One day he went to the king to ask for alms. The king offered him one hundred rupees as alms. But the brahmin refused to take them and said : "I don't want one hundred rupees. Just give me anything, even a paisa, which you have earned by the sweat of your brow."

The king was perplexed. He could give nothing, as there was nothing he had earned by his own labour. So he asked the brahmin to come after two days.

Next day, the king got up early in the morning, discarded his royal robes, put on old, torn garments, and went to a nearby village. There he came across the foreman of a labour-gang working on the road and asked him if he could give him some work. The foreman asked :

"What work can you do ? Can you dig the earth ?"

"Yes," the king replied.

"Alright, then take this pick axe and dig a pti there and bring some earth for the road."

The king picked up the axe and started digging. But unaccustomed as he was to doing any hard labour, very soon he started perspiring profusely, and he could hardly hold the axe as there were sores on his palms. The foreman saw his plight and remarked :

* A fictitious town with no geographical identity, and is used in most Maharashtrian tales.

"Look here, it seems you cannot dig any more. You are drenched in perspiration."

And throwing a four-anna piece toward him, he asked the king to take it and go away. The king picked up the coin and walked home.

Next day the king came to the royal court dressed in regal finery, with the four-anna coin in his pocket. The brahmin came again and asked for alms. The king took out the coin from his pocket and gave it to him saying: "This I have earned with the sweat of my brow."

What did the brahmin do? He just planted the coin in a bed of Tulsi plants near the well in his backyard. The coin soon sprouted and it developed into a mighty tree, with its roots striking deep in the well. The tree was in no time laden with rupee coins. One day the king's men, on a round of collecting flowers for Puja in the royal household, saw the rupee-laden tree. They went straight and reported to the king:



"Your garden is nothing! The brahmin has

a tree in his backyard which bears shining silver rupees."

The king was greatly astonished. He ordered his army to uproot the tree and bring it to him. But the brahmin would not allow the men even to touch the tree. He said: "Let the king himself come and take the tree away if he wants." When the king came and wanted to uproot the tree, the brahmin asked him: "Well, king, do you remember what you had given me? Just a four-anna piece. But because you had earned it with the sweat of your brow, it developed into a mighty tree. So the tree is yours. But remember that in fact you gave me only four-annas. But if it pleases you, you can take away whatever you gave me."

The king felt humbled and went his way.

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THE STORY OF SAMPAT FRIDAY

IN Maharashtra there is a folk tale relating to each day of the week. There is a *vrata*—the worship and ritual—prescribed for the reigning deity of each day, and the devotee believes that through its observance he derives a specific benefit. The present tale is about the *vrata* known as the *sampat* (wealth) observed on Fridays. Its observance brings wealth and prosperity. The recitation of the story forms a part of the *vrata*.

In a town, At-Pat-Nagar, there lived a poor brahmin. He was so poor that he could hardly make both ends meet. One day when his wife paid a social visit to her neighbour, she related to her the tale of her misery. The neighbour told her to observe the ritual and worship Goddess Laxmi—the reigning deity of Friday. She said: "Start this ritual from any Friday in the month of *Shrawan*. Keep fast for the whole day. In the evening invite five married women, wash their feet, make traditional offerings of milk and sugar and apply *kum-kum* to their foreheads. Distribute roasted gram as *prasadam*. Do this for one year and the Goddess will bestow you with prosperity." She came home, offered a sincere prayer to Goddess Laxmi and commenced her Friday worship. Months passed but they remained poor as ever.

In the same town lived her rich brother with his proud wife and children. They lived in a pala-

tial house and it was replete with food-grains and wealth. Once the brother decided to perform *Sahasrabhojana*, i.e. to feed a thousand brahmins. The ceremony of feasting was to go on for the whole week. The brother and sister-in-law invited almost the whole town but not the sister. They were ashamed of her poverty. When the sister learnt about the *Sahasrabhojana*, she said to her husband: "I will go to my brother's house."

Her husband trying to discourage her, said: "You have not been invited, please do not go".

But she protested:

"Sister-in-law may have forgotten to invite me. After all it is my brother's house. Do I need an invitation to go to his house? When he is feeding a thousand people, surely I and my four children would not be such a burden on them."

Saying this she got ready to go to her brother. She had no new sari nor any ornaments. So she put on a simple sari of daily wear, and dressed her children the same way. At her brother's place, wherever she turned her eyes, she saw the guests attired in rich garments. Her sister-in-law was moving about in the gathering, flaunting her rich *Paithani** and precious ornaments. She noticed her brother standing at the entrance of the *mandapam* but he ignored her. When she went inside, her sister-in-law did not even show her the common courtesy of asking her to come in and have meals. Though the sister felt hurt, she behaved as if it was her own house. Hundreds of wooden seats were kept in a row with *thalis* laid before them full of rich food. She and her children occupied their seats. When the sister-in-law came to serve ghee, she saw her and said: "Well sister, how have you

* A silk brocade sari made at Paithan in Marathawada, much in fashion in olden days.

come? Did your brother invite you?' Saying this she cast a contemptuous glance at her and her poorly-clad children and walked away. The sister finished her meal and went home with a heavy heart.

Next day her children insisted on her to go again to their uncle's place, saying: "There we would get rich food again." Though reluctant, she thought, "After all he is my brother. What does it matter if his wife insulted me. Since I am poor, I have got to put up with such insults." The sister-in-law this time humiliated her with stronger words and asked her not to come again. But when she found her again on the third day she got furious. She rushed to her husband, fuming with rage and shouted for all to hear: "Every day your sister comes uninvited bringing her half-a-dozen children with her. People assembled here laugh at me. I feel ashamed of her. Ask her to go away."

The brother who was under his wife's thumb, also felt annoyed by his sister's presence. He went straight to her and said:

"Why do you come uninvited? People ridicule us on your account. We feel ashamed. Go home and don't show your face again." He then caught hold of her hand and drove her and her children out.

She felt broken-hearted. She offered a solemn prayer to Goddess Laxmi and fasted the whole day, bitterly weeping and saying: "Look how poverty reduces man to nothing. Poverty has estranged from me even my brother." The goddess took pity on her and soon she saw a definite turn in her fortune. Her husband's trade picked up. Meanwhile she was vigorously observing the Friday ritual and by the end of the year they were rolling in wealth.

For the terminal pooja and feast, she invited her brother and sister-in-law. They had already heard about the sister's prosperity, so they felt very humbled and with great cordiality the brother said: "Sister, come to our house for dinner one day. Please don't say 'No', else we will feel hurt."

She accepted the invitation.

On the appointed day the sister with all her finery and ornaments visited her brother's house. The sister-in-law came out to receive her, washed her feet with hot water and seated her respectfully on the carpet. She was dancing attendance on the sister, as if nothing was too good for her. Silver plates and bowls were laid out for dinner among decorative *Rangoli* motifs. Fragrance of the incense sticks filled the air. Choicest dishes were prepared for the dinner. When everything was ready, the brother and his wife took hold of the sister's hand and escorting her to her seat, requested her to commence the meal. But the sister did not show any inclination to touch the food. The sister-in-law then



solicitously asked : "What is the matter sister ? Is there anything wanting ?"

The sister said : "Please lay an empty plate by my side."

"For whom ?" both queried.

The sister said : "First put down the plate and then I will explain."

The brother hurriedly placed a plate as desired. Meanwhile the sister took off all her ornaments and arranged them neatly in the empty plate. She then started putting each item of the eatables on the ornaments. The brother and his wife were perplexed at what the sister was doing, and asked : "Sister what are you doing ?" The sister explained calmly : "I am feeding these ornaments. You have invited me to dinner today because I have these ornaments. Actually you have invited the ornaments for dinner and not me."

The brother felt abashed at this. Then both the brother and his wife touched the sister's feet and begged for her forgiveness.

4

PAVANDEVA AND HIS WIFE

PAVNI is a small town in Bhandara in Maharashtra. The aboriginal tribes in the neighbouring areas believe that ages ago it was the capital of Pavandeva—the wind god. King Pavan had a large empire which extended from Bhandak in Chanda in the south, to Amraoti in the west. It was said that he used to take his bath at Pavni, his day's meal at Bhandak and night's rest at Amraoti. His wife Kamalarani, 'the Queen of Waterlily', had miraculous powers. She could walk on the tanks, stand on the lotus leaves in water, could draw water in unbaked earthen pots with untwined string. Although very rich, the king and queen, always wore simple white garments and worked with their own hands. For this simplicity they were loved and respected by their people. Tribute was paid to the king in iron ore.

The royal couple had a touchstone and they could, if necessary, turn their subjects' tribute of iron ore into gold. But they did not need this precious metal as the queen wore no ornaments. Yet even without them she possessed unequalled charm. But once during the Pola festival the queen saw other women dressed in colourful rich garments and wearing precious ornaments. She thought she too must have these things. She went to her husband, Pavandeva and pleaded : "Look, how rich garments and ornaments enhance a woman's beauty ! I too want to have ornaments like those women !"

Pavandeva at first could not believe that Kamlarani who, all along was so simple, and never even wore a single ornament, should be pining for jewellery or rich garments. He tried to persuade her by saying : "Kamlarani, white is the king of all colours. With your simple white dress you have no match in grace and beauty in the entire universe. Why do you want to degrade your divine charm to the level of the mortals ? If you insist, you may have to repent later."

But the queen insisted : "Make me all types of ornaments by our touch stone. I must have them for the festival."

Pavandeva felt sad but he did not argue further. He gave everything his wife desired. When Kamlarani joined the other women in the Pola festivity, she was like one among the many. No longer could she be distinguished from others by her white apparel. She was just ignored. She came home greatly disenchanted. Her eyes opened but it was too late.

When she dropped her usual unbaked earthen pot in the well to draw water, the flimsy untwined string could not bear the weight of the pot as before and snapped. While the pot too could not hold water, it became clay and dissolved into water. When she started crossing the tank and set foot on the lotus leaf she found herself drowning.

She now knew what had befallen her. Her miraculous powers had vanished. She had desires like ordinary mortals, so like them she must be. She was herself the cause of her undoing.

Kamlarani was broken-hearted. The king too was sad and indifferent.

But they did not have to grieve long. A mighty earthquake shook their land and Pavni was overthrown and destroyed.

In its place later sprang up a small town which still bears the same name.

SATI GODAWARI

TALL and handsome, prince Sambhaji the, eldest son of king Shivaji, was only seventeen at that time. Great preparations were going on for the coronation of Shivaji when he was to be formally declared as the "Defender of the faith, protector of the Mother Cow and the Brahmins, Shri Chhatrapati Maharaj." So the king along with his queen, mother Jijamata, his wives, sons and the royal family was staying at the Raigarh fort. But prince Sambhaji did not seem to be much concerned about his father's coronation. He would daily come out of the fort on the pretext of riding and would absent himself the whole day. Gradually his absence came to be noticed by Shivaji and the courtiers, and soon people started whispering about his doings.

It so happened that one Gangadhar Shastri of Ratnagiri, in Konkan was on his way with his daughter-in-law Godawari to her husband; his son's place near Raigarh. Godawari was known as a very beautiful and virtuous woman. She had only recently come of age and was being taken to her husband for the first time.

While on a riding spree, Sambhaji sighted the travelling party consisting of the old Shastri, two attendants and the beautiful young woman. He made enquiries of them and when his eye fell on the young girl, he was struck by her beauty. He wanted to marry her. Forgetting his royal birth, his

father's reputation and the risk involved, he attacked the three men. Armed and brave as he was, he soon overpowered them and made them afraid for their lives.

A little beyond the Raigarh fort on the border between the two villages of Pane and Pandheri, stands the Lingana fort. Close to its walls, there is a big natural cave in the adjoining mountains. During Shivaji's time the cave was used for keeping prisoners, so it had a strong iron door too.

Sambhaji kept Godawari in this cave. He arranged for a maid-servant and posted two soldiers to keep watch on the cave. Every day he would go there and try to persuade the girl to marry him. Godawari's reply would be : "I am already married, you are like my brother. Send me back to my father-in-law, or my husband."

Days passed but Sambhaji did not give up hope. He still believed that he would win over Godawari one day. By and by the news spread to the fort and reached Jijamata and Shivaji.

Jijamata immediately sent for her grandson and straightaway took him to task : "We are ashamed of you," she said, "you have sullied your father's great name. Fie on you ! Tell me who is the girl you are torturing ?"

Sambhaji stood hanging his head down but kept his mouth shut. Shivaji who was sitting by his mother, said more in anguish than anger :

"I call myself a 'Protector of the Mother-Cow and the Brahmins' and here is my son, the future king of the Marathas, who tries to rob married brahmin girls of their virtue ! Go away from my sight."

But Sambhaji stood still.

Next day Shivaji sent his two courtiers to the cave and brought Godawari to the fort. When she was brought into the palace, both Jijamata and Shivaji bowed before her and Shivaji touched her feet.

Seeing the great Maratha king and the queen-mother, both of them much senior to her in age, paying respects to her, Godawari was nonplussed and overwhelmed for a while. Seeing her plight, Jijamata said :

"My daughter, this is the kingdom of Shivaji who has taken a vow to protect the sacred Cow and the Brahmins. And a brahmin Sati, though younger in age is worthy of our worship."

Then Jijamata called Sambhaji and ordered him to bow to her. "That is the only way to wash away your sins," said Shivaji.

When Sambhaji after some hesitation touched her feet, Godawari's face brightened up. She said : "Now you are my brother."

Next morning quite unexpectedly Godawari said to Jijamata : "Queen mother, I have to make you one request. Please make preparations for my funeral pyre. I want to perform Sati."

Jijamata was aghast. She called Shivaji, Sambhaji and others in the palace and conveyed Godawari's desire to them. They were all stunned. In fact Shivaji was arranging to send her to her husband. He asked Godawari :

"Daughter, we are making arrangements for your journey home. Tell us where you wish to go—to your father or to your husband? We will try to make amends for the humiliation caused to you by us. We will try to convince your father-in-law and your husband of your chastity and virtue, and tell them that you are as pure as the Ganges."

"But how is it possible now?" said Godawari,

"What did the society say about Sita who went through fire to prove her innocence? I am a mere mortal as compared to her. I have no other way left but to prove my chasity by burning myself. Please arrange for the pyre."



As she spoke, Godawari's face wore an expression of unearthly beauty. They all knew that her determination to immolate herself was firm and final. Shivaji then sent his men to find a suitable place for the pyre. Others made arrangements for the religious ritual. Jijamata, along with Godawari and other royal women came to Wadi—the place of *Sati*—in a palanquin. Sambhaji himself was one of its bearers.

Sati's pyre was ready. Godawari, standing on the rock near it, distributed her ornaments to other married women. Then they all bowed to her. She

blessed everyone, wished well of the Maratha kingdom, and climbing the steps of the sandalwood pyre said : "After three days the Ganges water will gush out from under this rock. It will be a witness to my purity."

The pyre was lit. The red flames rose high into the sky, and with it the pure heart of Sati Godawari.

A black-stone *Samadhi* built about three hundred years ago at Wadi, is still seen today. People call it 'Sati Godawari's *Samadhi*.'

6

A FUNNY STORY

IN a tribal village there lived an old Gond couple. Once they had a violent quarrel over the food. The old woman had prepared seven *Bhakris* and the quarrel arose over their division. The wife said : "I have prepared them, so I shall have more."

But the husband said : "I have paid for them, so I must have more."

They quarrelled till they were both exhausted. They lay down to sleep leaving the supper uneaten. At midnight, the old man sat up and said :

"Let us come to terms, whosoever speaks first will have three, and whosoever keeps silent longer will have four."

They agreed to this and again lay down and kept silent. Not a word at night. Dawn broke, yet no word passed between them. The day and the night passed. Yet both kept mum. Thus two days passed away. No sound came from their house. Neighbours thought it strange.

"What's happened to the old couple?" They said. They went and knocked at the door. There was no response. Then they forcibly opened the door and found both lying on the floor, eyes closed. Two days of hunger had made them pale and weak. The neighbours went near and asked :

"Eh, old man, is anything wrong?"

No reply came. They went to the wife. But she too did not move. So the neighbours thought that they were dead. They made arrangements for their funeral and when they were complete they placed them on the bier and seven neighbours took them to the graveyard. Even then the couple did not utter a word. But when their bodies were being lowered in the grave, the wife quietly said :

"Alright, I will eat three, you can have four."

As soon as the seven men heard her words, they thought the corpses had become ghosts and they meant to eat the seven men. In their terror they threw the bodies and ran for their lives.

Now the old couple was greatly surprised. They did not understand why their neighbours ran away dropping their bodies with a thud. To find out the reason of their act, they pulled themselves up and began running after them.

In the meantime the seven neighbours went to the police station and reported the matter. The police inspector along with a couple of constables started towards the graveyard for investigation of the ghost story. But before they had gone a few paces, they saw the Gond couple running in their direction. The policemen were so scared that they too started running. They went straight to their king and narrated the whole story. The king too was equally alarmed. He took his wife and children and left the palace in a great hurry. Within minutes the whole palace was empty.

The couple, when they saw the policemen running as their neighbours did, were even more mystified. So they followed them. But as they were old and fasting for the last two days, they could not

run fast. By the time they reached the palace, they found not a soul in sight.

Then they stayed in the palace undisturbed and lived there happily ever after.

Gonds believe that after this, 'Fear' came into this world and since then man has been afraid of ghosts.

7

A PRINCE WITH SIX TOES

KING Sudharmik was blessed with a son who had six toes on his left foot. The court astrologers told the king : "This is an omen of poverty. The boy is born under evil stars and presages your early death." Soon after, a powerful enemy invaded the kingdom and killed Sudharmik. His wife immolated herself on the funeral pyre. The prince's maid brought the boy secretly to Kuntalpur, now, Katol, near Nagpur. She took up a domestic job and reared him for three years till her death. Then the orphan boy grew to the age of five on alms and help of the women of the town who loved him because of his great devotion to God.

One day on his usual round of begging and singing *Bhajans*, he went to the palace of Dhrishtabuddhi, minister to king of Kuntalpur. Hundreds of Brahmins were being entertained to a feast at that time. When the Brahmins saw the singing boy they told the minister : "This boy will become king one day and will own your wealth." The minister was enraged. He thought : "This boy will usurp the kingdom of Kuntalpur and rob me of all my wealth. It is best to get rid of him now."

So he ordered two assassins to take the boy to the forest and kill him. When they drew their swords, he asked them to wait till he finished his prayers. They were so charmed by his winning smile and innocence that they could not carry out the evil deed. Instead, they cut off his sixth toe, showed it to the minister and collected their reward.

With his sixth toe now gone, the curse of poverty was lifted. While wandering alone in the forest, he met King Kulinda who had come for hunting. The king felt pity for the boy, took him to his capital Chandanawati and entrusted him to his Queen Meghawati. She had no child of her own so she looked after him with love and named him Chandrasahsa.

When Chandrasahsa was eight, the king performed his thread ceremony. He was taught the *Vedas*, the scriptures and all other branches of learning, and trained as an expert archer.

When he was fifteen he said to the king : "I want to embark on a mission of 'Digvijaya'—(the conquest of the world.)"

"You are so young," said the king, "how can you at such a young age face the mighty kings ?"

"I will prove it by my deeds," insisted the young prince.

At that time King Kulinda was a feudatory of the King of Kuntalpur. So the king said to Chandrasahsa : "The enemies of Kuntalpur are harassing the King. So you destroy them first."

The young prince succeeded in his mission beyond all expectations. Apart from defeating all the enemies, he collected vast wealth. The king was dazzled by this achievement. He sent a portion of the wealth as tribute to the king of Kuntalpur with the message : "My son Chandrasahsa has returned unconquered after defeating all our enemies."

Greatly overjoyed, the king of Kuntalpur then sent his minister Dhrishtabuddhi to Chandanawati to see the conqueror prince. When the minister met King Kulinda, he queried : "How is it that you never informed us that you had a son ?"

Then king Kulinda narrated how he had come by Chandrahasa. The minister was upset when he saw the prince. From the cut sixth toe of his left foot, he recognized him at once. He thought of a strategem. On the pretext of sending him to present himself to the king of Kuntalpur, he sent him with a letter to his son Madan.

On his way to Kuntalpur Chandrahasa made a halt for some rest in a garden on the bank of a lake. As he was tired he fell asleep. It so happened that Princess Champakmalini had come for a picnic in the garden with her friends. With them was Vishaya, the daughter of Dhrishtabuddhi. While



strolling in the garden by herself, Vishaya came to the place where Chandrahasa was sleeping. Her curiosity was aroused. When she went nearer, she instantly fell in love with the handsome sleeping prince. She then saw a letter peeping out of his pocket. She quietly took the letter and was surprised to find that it was addressed to her brother. She opened it and read: "Give '*Visha*' (poison) to the bearer of this letter."

Now Vishaya was puzzled. She could not understand why her father should wish to give poison to such a handsome prince. There must be

some mistake. "Is it that my father wants to give me—'*Vishaya*' and not *Visha* to the prince?" thought Vishaya. So with some *Kajal* and stem of a leaf she added letters 'ya' and *Visha* (poison) became '*Vishaya*'. She slipped the letter back in the pocket and quietly left to join her friends.

After his rest in the garden, Chandrahasa went straight to Madan who welcomed the idea of his father of marrying his sister Vishaya to such a handsome and brave prince. He solemnised their marriage with due pomp and show.

Meanwhile when Chandrahasa left for Kuntalpur, Dhrishtabuddhi imprisoned King Kulinda, grabbing all the wealth Chandrahasa had.

When he came near his mansion, he was surprised at the activity going on there. There was a *mandapam* in front of the house and a lot of people were moving about gayly to the accompaniment of *Shahnai*. He asked the people there: "What is all this bustle about?"

"Don't you know? This is in honour of Vishaya's marriage."

"Vishaya's marriage? With whom?"

"With Prince Chandrahasa of Chandanawati."

Dhrishtabuddhi cursed his fate. He had expected Chandrahasa to have been killed. Instead he had become his son-in-law.

Two attempts at killing Chandrahasa had failed. So, he decided to try once again.

On a hill outside the town there was a temple of goddess Chandika. He ordered two assassins to conceal themselves in the temple and kill the person who would come to worship the goddess in the evening. After arranging this, he said to his son-

in-law Chandrahasa : "It is a custom in our family to offer worship to goddess Chandika after every auspicious ceremony. So you go to the temple this evening to offer your homage."

On his way to the temple, Chandrahasa met Madan with an urgent message from the king of Kuntalpur. Madan said : "The king has summoned you immediately. He has decided to retire from life. He is marrying his daughter Champakmalini to you and make you king in his place." Chandrahasa immediately left for the palace, while Madan took from him the tray containing flowers, incense sticks, oil lamp and other articles required for worship, and went straight to the temple.

Next day when Dhrishtabuddhi, heard Chandrahasa proclaimed as king, he raged with helpless fury. He knew something had gone wrong. When he rushed to the temple, he found Madan's body, with its head chopped off lying in a pool of blood. He at last realised that one cannot harm a person whom God protects. He repented for his evil deeds and shocked by his son's death, killed himself by dashing his head against a pillar.

A Sadhu who saw the dead bodies informed about them to Chandrahasa, the new king. He at once rushed to the temple, sat in penance in front of the goddess, making an offering of his own body in the sacred fire. The goddess pleased at his devotion, directed him to ask for a boon. He requested her to restore the two dead persons to life, which she did. He then brought Madan and Dhrishtabuddhi in a procession to the palace.

Chandrahasa then decided to go to Chandanawati to see his father Kulinda. When he reached there he found that the king and his consort Meghawati, fed up with the harassment of Dhrishtabuddhi's henchmen, were on the point of immolat-

ing themselves in fire. He rescued them and told them all that had happened.

Under the wise guidance of his father, he ruled happily over his kingdom for many years.

The story of this devotee prince is narrated in the religious books of Maharashtra.

FOUR WISE MINISTERS

VEEERASENA, the king of Vijapur was known far and wide as a wise and kind ruler. He was kindhearted, no doubt, the credit for his benevolent rule was due to the wisdom of his four ministers who always advised him on matters concerning the welfare of his subjects. But there were occasions when they had to bow before the royal will, even against their better judgement.

An occasion for conflict arose when the king desired to build a luxurious palace for himself and in order to raise money for its building, he decided to levy a heavy tax on the people, both rich and poor. The ministers opposed this proposal, frankly telling him that it would be unjust to tax people for such a luxury. They knew that their plain-speaking would incur the king's wrath and cost them even their position in the court. But this time they decided not to yield to the king's whims. As expected, the king was enraged and he not only dismissed them but also banished them from his kingdom.

The four exiled ministers dressed as wayfarers left the capital and walked aimlessly not knowing where to go. When the scorching sun began to beat on their heads in the afternoon, they took shelter under a banyan tree. Soon they noticed that it had rained in those parts the previous night and noticed the footprints of a camel that must have passed its solitary way. With nothing to do, these four highly intelligent persons then decided to while away their time by trying to visualise what the camel was like by examining its footprints on the wet ground.

While they were thus engaged, a camel-rider came running to them crying aloud that he had lost his camel and asked them whether they had seen it passing that way. The first minister asked him, "Was your camel lame in one hind leg?"

"Yes, Sir, sure he was. Did he go this way?"

But without answering his question the second minister asked him, "Not only lame, but it was blind in one eye too, isn't it?"

"Yes-yes, Sahib! It had only one eye. Surely you must have seen it. Won't you tell me where it has gone?"

"We have not seen your camel. But we can say that it had no tail either. Is it true?" asked the third minister.

"It's true. He had no tail. He lost it last year in an accident," replied the camel-rider who had lost his patience by now. He asked: "But how do you know all this without seeing my camel? Surely it is you who must have stolen it!"

"Believe me, we have not seen your camel, let alone steal it," said the fourth minister calmly. "Even then, I can further tell you that it is not keeping well."

"What more, O God!" shouted the camel-rider. "What more proof do I need, you thieves? I am now certain that you have stolen it. Give me back my camel, otherwise I will report the matter to the king."

The first minister tried to calm the agitated camel-rider and said: "Listen, man! I tell you once again that we have not seen your camel. You may complain to the king if you like, but nothing will come out of it. Better search it elsewhere

without wasting time and stop making false charges against honest people !”

“Honest people, my foot,” said the enraged camel-rider. “You think honesty comes by dressing like well-to-do people. With all your dress, you are the greatest rogues I have ever met. I shall go to the king.”

Saying this he ran to the king’s palace shouting all the way in anger but more in sorrow : “I must have justice ! I will see that I get justice.”

He had run hardly half the way, when he saw king Veerasena along with his bodyguards passing that way for his usual evening ride. The camel-rider came straight to the king and falling prostrate before him, cried : “My Lord, see how the poor are robbed in your kingdom ! I am a poor camel-rider. If I don’t get my camel, I will be ruined. Help the poor wretch O, Lord !”

“Stop babbling man !” commanded the king. “Be calm and tell me what has happened.”

The camel-rider then narrated the whole story by requesting : “Let justice be done, my Lord. Let me show you the thieves.”

The king, then accompanied by the camel-rider and the bodyguards reached the banyan tree where the four ministers were still sitting calmly, forgetting the whole incident.

King Veerasena was greatly surprised to see that the accused were none other than his exiled ministers. He knew they were incapable of stealing, least of all a camel. He would have passed his judgement even without an enquiry. But he thought that it is not enough that justice is done, but people must feel and know that justice is done.

So he started questioning the ministers about the camel. “Your Majesty, we have not even seen the camel, let alone steal it,” they said. This

appeared even more surprising than the charge made against them. So he asked : “But how did you know that the camel was lame in the hind leg ?”

“This is very elementary sir !” The first minister explained, “you have only to look at the camel’s footprints on the wet ground. Your Majesty can see for yourself that the animal was unable to put his hind leg firmly on the ground.”

The king, his bodyguards and the camel-rider all looked at the footprints and found the minister’s statement correct.

“I can see that it’s true ! But how did you find out that he had only one eye ?”

The second minister replied : “Sir, we not only know that he is blind in one eye, but also that it is its left eye that is blind.”

“But how ?” the king asked in surprise.

“By simple deduction ! Your Majesty can see that though there is more grass on the left side the camel has eaten only the grass on the right side. That means he had no left eye to see the grass on the left side.”

The king and others were easily convinced of this as they saw all the grass on the left side untouched.

“But how about the tail ? How did you know that the camel had no tail ? Not from the footsteps or the grass, surely.”

“No, Your Majesty ! We presumed this from the gnats lying on the ground,” the third minister replied.

They all saw the ground strewn with several bodies of gnats. They had drunk so much blood that they could not move. The minister explained :

"If the camel had a tail it would have whisked them off before they could drink so much of its blood."

The king conceded this point also. The camel-rider was so much convinced by now that when the fourth minister explained that the camel's dung showed that it was ill, he knew that they were innocent. He apologised for calling them thieves and rascals.

The king too, who already knew about their honesty, was now impressed by their intelligence. He said to them: "Your deep wisdom has opened my eyes. You have wide open eyes by which you see things which others don't. Your alert minds draw lessons from small things. I accept your advice not to tax people. Will you now be my ministers again?"

The ministers bowed their heads and accepted the gracious offer. The camel-rider was then given another camel which was not ill, not blind, had both eyes and a complete tail and all the four legs sound.

9

THREE CLEVER MEN AND A DEMON

HE was known as a 'Pearl-shooter'. He was rich and had a beautiful wife. His chief amusement was shooting with a bow and arrow at which he was so clever that every morning he would shoot through one of the pearls in his wife's nose-ring without hurting her at all.

One day his wife's brother came to take his sister home. He asked her: "Why do you look so pale? Does your husband ill-treat you?"

"No," the sister replied, "he is very kind, and I have plenty of everything. But everyday he amuses himself by shooting one of the pearls in my nose-ring. I feel terrified that if he misses his aim one day, the arrow might kill me. I am in constant fear, but don't want to displease him, as he takes great pleasure in it."

"What does he say to you about it?"

"He proudly asks me: 'Is there anyone as clever as I am?' And I say: 'No, I don't think'."

The brother then told her: "Tomorrow when he asks you this question, tell him: 'There are many men cleverer than you'."

Next day she did as her brother had taught her. The Pearl-shooter became upset by his wife's reply and said:

"If there are men cleverer than me as you say, then I will not rest till I have found them."

Saying this, he left his wife, and went on a long journey into the jungle.

On and on and on he went a very long way, until he came to a big river where he saw a traveller eating food. The Pearl-shooter sat by him and started conversing :

"Where are you going ? For what purpose ?"

"I am a wrestler, and the strongest man in the country," the traveller replied, "I can do wonderful feats of wrestling, lift up heavy weights and thought I was the cleverest, but lately I have heard about a very clever Pearl-shooter and I want to find him."

"Then you need not travel further. I am the man you heard about."

The wrestler was happy with the Pearl-shooter's reply and asked :

"But what made you travel ?"

"The same reason. To find out men more clever than me."

"Then let us be brothers and go together," said the wrestler, "perhaps we can find men better than us." They had not gone very far when they met another traveller. To their query, he told them : "I am a Pandit, a man of learning and honoured for my intelligence. I thought none was cleverer than me, but recently I have heard about a Pearl-shooter and a wrestler and I want to find out if it is true."

"It is true. We are the two men you seek," they said. The Pandit was overjoyed. He said : "Let us be brothers. As your homes are too far away, let us go to my house, rest a while and then put our powers to test."

The proposal was accepted and soon they reached the Pandit's house.

Now in the Pandit's kitchen there was an enormous cauldron of iron, and twenty-five persons were required to lift it. At the dead of the night, the wrestler thought of proving his power. He lifted it on his shoulders, quietly went down the river and wending through the deepest part of it buried it into the sand. Accomplishing this feat, he came back, quietly rolled himself up in the blanket and went fast asleep. But as luck would have it, the Pandit's wife had heard him. Waking her husband, she whispered : "I hear footsteps. Some thieves perhaps. Strange that they should choose a moonlit night for theft." So they got up, searched the whole house and found only the cauldron missing. They were surprised, that the thieves should steal such a huge cauldron and no ornaments or other valuable articles. Soon they discovered a man's footprints starting from the kitchen upto the river, but none on the other bank. They deduced that one man with a heavy load had walked upto the river. The Pandit suspecting the wrestler licked his skin and found no salt on it. So he said to his wife, "His body smells fresh and wet, that means he went into the river upto the neck. Tomorrow I will surprise him by showing that I know what he did."

Next morning the Pandit accosted them : "Let us go to the river for a bath. I can't give you water for bath, because our cauldron has disappeared mysteriously this very night."

"But where can it go ?" asked the wrestler showing surprise.

"Ah, where indeed !" The Pandit led them to the river and showed : "See, how far it has travelled."

"But who could have put it there ?" The wrestler asked innocently.

"Why, I think it's you !" the Pandit said smilingly. Then he narrated what his wife had said and what he did. The wrestler and the Pearl-shooter were both astonished by the Pandit's wisdom.

Then the three spent the day amusing and laughing. In the evening the Pandit said : "Let us have a royal feast to-night. You strong man, go and catch the fattest goat for the meal."

The wrestler went far into the forest where he saw many goats grazing and browsing upon the hill side. Now a wicked demon saw him and said to himself : "I will play some tricks with his friends, if I make him choose me." So he converted himself into a fat goat. The wrestler caught him by the neck and though he kicked hard was brought to the Pandit's door.

When the Pandit saw the goat and the wrestler holding it so tight that its eyes bulged from its head and looked fiery and evil, like burning coals, he at once knew that it was a demon and said to himself : "If I appear to be frightened, then the demon will devour us all. I must try to intimidate him." So he said loudly :

"O, wrestler, foolish friend ! What have you brought ? I asked you to bring a fat goat and you brought only this wretched demon. We are hungry people. My child eats one demon a day, my wife three, and myself twelve, while we have only one between us all."

The demon was frightened. He implored : "O Sir, have pity on me. Don't eat me, I will bring you as much wealth as you say, if you leave me."

"But how are we to believe you that you will come back ?" the Pandit shouted.

"I promise, I will come and bring bagfuls of money. Only let me go."

The demon was then set free. He went to the demon-land and repeated the story to his colleagues. He told them, "Let us give money to this man who eats twelve demons a day. Else he will eat us all."

After three days when the demon returned with the promised money, the Pandit roared : "Why are you so late ? We are all sitting hungry."

"Sir, my fellow-demons detained me. They cursed me for bringing money to you. They are soon going to judge me in the council for serving you," said the terrorised demon.

"Where is the council to be held ?"

"Far away in the depths of the jungle, to be presided over by the demon-king in his court."

"We would like to see your king and the council. Take us there."

"The demon then seated all the three on his back and carried them. On and on and on, as fast as the wings could cut the air, they went and reached the heart of the jungle. The demon then sat them on a tall tree, just over the seat of their king's throne.

Soon they heard a great rustling noise. Thousands of demons assembled there. Then the demon-king asked the guilty demon why he gave wealth to the mortals and obeyed their orders. The demon said : "They are not ordinary mortals but great and terrible ones."

"Let us see these people, only then we will believe..."

But before the king could finish his sentence, the Pearl-shooter's arrow pierced the demon's ear-ring and sent it flying in the air. The king stood

up in fright. But in the twinkling of an eye, the bough, which they were sitting on, crashed under the weight of the wrestler and they fell on the head of the demon-king one upon another, as if from the sky. They battered his body with their blows saying :

"So be it, we will eat him first and the other demons afterwards." The demons, hearing this, flew away, and the king was allowed to go only after he had promised to fill their house with wealth.

They were brought back to the Pandit's house, whose courage had saved them from being eaten. The money was divided into three parts. The Pearl-shooter gave bagfuls of money to his wife after reaching home and said :

"It's true, there are men cleverer than me," and left shooting pearls thereafter.

10

HOW LORD VITHOBA CAME TO PANDHARPUR

PANDHARPUR is the most popular place of pilgrimage in Maharashtra. Twice every year, in the months of *Ashadha* and *Kartik*, a great jatra is held on *Ekadashi*, the eleventh day of the month. Thousands of devotees of Vithoba called *warkaris*, set out for the pilgrimage on foot. They travel in groups known as *dindis*, carrying palanquins of saint poets of Maharashtra and singing *abhangas* all the way. This is the story of how the presiding deity of Pandharpur, Lord Vithoba, happened to come there.

It is said that Pandharpur was founded by devotee Pundalik. His father Janudeva and mother Satyavati lived in what is now known as Pandharpur but was then a thick forest called Dandirvan. Pundalik was a devoted son but soon after his marriage he began to ill-treat and harass his parents. To escape from their misery, the parents decided to go on a pilgrimage and joined a group of pilgrims going to Kashi.

When Pundalik's wife learnt this, she also decided to go. She and her husband joined the same group of pilgrims on horseback. The ill-tempered wife probably did not want the old couple to escape from her clutches. While the son and his wife rode on horseback, the old couple walked. Every evening when the party camped for the night, the son forced his parents to groom the horses and

do other menial jobs. The poor parents cursed the day they decided to go on a pilgrimage.

In course of time, the party reached the *ashrama* of the great sage Kukkutswami. There they decided to spend a couple of nights. They were all tired by the march and all fell asleep except Pundalik who could not get even a wink of sleep. Just before daybreak he saw a group of beautiful young women, attired in dirty clothes, enter the *ashrama*, clean the floor, fetch water and wash the swami's clothes. Soon after they entered the inner room of the *ashrama*, and shortly came out in beautifully clean clothes and passing near Pundalik, vanished.

Next night he saw the same sight again. Pundalik threw himself at their feet and begged them to give out to him who they were. They said they were the Ganga, Yamuna and other holy rivers of India in which the pilgrims bathed and washed their sins. Their clothes were dirtied by the sins of the bathing pilgrims. "And because of your ill-treatment of your parents," they said "you are the greatest sinner." Their rebuke brought about a complete change in him and he became the most devoted of sons. Now the parents rode the horses while the son and his wife, walked by their side. By their love and affection, the son and his wife persuaded the parents to give up the pilgrimage and return to Dandirvan.

One day it so happened that Lord Krishna, the King of Dwarka, while feeling lonely, was reminded of his early days in Mathura. He particularly remembered his sports with the milkmaids, the cowherd boys and his eternal love Radha. Though she was dead, he longed to see Radha again. By his divine powers he brought her back to life and seated her by his side. Just then queen, Rukmini, entered the room. When Radha did not rise to pay her due respect, Rukmini left

HOW LORD VITHOBA CAME TO PANDHARPUR

Dwarka in a rage and hid herself in Dandirvan forest.

When the spell of Radha's charm abated, Lord Krishna started on a search for Rukmini. He first went to Mathura thinking that she had gone there. Then to Gokul. He played with the cows, the milkmaids and the cowherd boys. They too joined in the search. They went to Mount Govardhan also in their search.

At last they reached the bank of the river Bhima in the Deccan. Krishna left his companions at Gopalpura, a spot just outside the Dandirvan forest and he himself entered the woods alone in search of his consort. He at last found Rukmini and managed to appease her.

The reconciled Krishna and Rukmini set forth together until they came to Pundalik's *ashrama*.



But at that time Pundalik was busy in attending to his parents. Though he knew Lord Krishna had

come to see him, he refused to pay his respects to the god before his duty towards his parents was done. He, however, threw a brick outside for Lord Krishna to stand upon.

Impressed by Pundalik's devotion to his parents, Lord Krishna did not mind the delay. Standing on the brick he awaited Pundalik's convenience. When Pundalik came out and begged the God's pardon, Lord Krishna replied that far from being displeased, He was pleased with his love for his parents.

Lord Krishna then ordered His worship as *Vithoba*, or the God who stood upon a brick. An imposing temple was built at the place where Krishna and Pundalik had met. In the inner sanctum stands Krishna's image on a brick. By his side stands the image of Rukmini. She was instrumental in bringing Krishna to Pandharpur.

11

HOW PATIL'S BUFALLO TURNED INTO A COCK

IT is not easy to come across an affectionate and devoted couple like Janba Patil and his wife Janai. With a little property, they led a contented life with their children in a small village. Everyone in the village knew them as kind-hearted and charitable.

One day Janai said to her husband : "I think we should sell one of the two she-buffaloes we have. One animal will be enough for our needs. I now cannot put in the same amount of work as before at this age."

"Alright," said Patil, "I will dispose it of in tomorrow's market."

Next day Patil along with the buffalo set out for the market early in the morning as the market place was quite some way off. On the way he met a man with a horse who asked : "Where are you going at such an early hour, Patilbaba ?"

"To the market, to sell this old buffalo."

The buffalo looked a fine animal. Looking longingly at it the stranger suggested : "Why sell it ? If you like my horse I can exchange it with your buffalo."

Patil gave it some thought. A horse is a less troublesome animal and the children can have some fun riding it. So he said : "Alright, give me your horse and take this buffalo."

He mounted the horse and headed for the market, but after a few paces he found that the horse was blind. Next he met a man with a cow.

"Well, Patilbaba ? Where to ?"

"I was bound for the market to sell my old buffalo. But I exchanged it for this horse on the way ; but he is blind."

"Exchanged it for a blind horse ? Then my cow is a much finer animal. If you like, I can give it to you in exchange for the horse."

Patil thought the cow looked a fine animal. Moreover, it involves less work than the horse. So he took the cow for the horse and went on his way, but he soon discovered that the cow was lame in one leg.

Next he met a man with a she-goat.

"On what mission, Patilbaba ?"

"I started in the morning to sell my old buffalo which I exchanged for a blind horse. Now I have got this lame cow for the horse. I am going to sell it."

"Sell it ? Then my she-goat is much better than your lame cow. If you want I can part with it for your cow."

Patil took the she-goat which he latter found to be ill. On the last lap of the journey he met a man with a cock. After a similar talk as before, he was left with a cock with him.

When he reached the market it was mid-day. He was feeling very hungry but he had not even a paisa with him. He had intended to do the marketing with the money he would have got for the buffalo. But on the way to the market the buffalo had been substituted by a cock.

With great difficulty he could sell the cock for one rupee, with which he purchased some eatables

to appease his hunger. After washing his hands and feet he sat under a pipal tree and spreading his eatables on a leaf started his modest repast. But before he could eat a single morsel, a man in soiled and tattered clothes appeared before him and implored : "Give the poor man some food. I have not eaten anything for the last two days and I am dying of hunger. God will bless you." When Patil saw the poor man's condition, he was overwhelmed with pity. So he gave him all the food that he had and went home.

Meanwhile, Patil's wife had scrubbed the house neat and clean and cooked the meal for the whole family. After completing her daily tasks, she sat in the backyard telling stories to her children, waiting for her husband's return. When Janba reached home, he seated himself with a tired sigh on the charpoy in the front room.

On seeing him, his children ran to him, followed by Janai. Looking at him with eagerness she said : "Aren't you rather late today ? I have been waiting for you with the meal ready."

"Yes, it is true I am very late. I will tell you everything that befell me today," said Patil, "but give me a glass of water first."

After drinking the water, Janba said : "I did not sell the buffalo; but I exchanged it for a horse."

"Is that so ? That's very fine," said Janai joyously. "Children can have fun riding the horse. Of what use is a buffalo ? Well children, go and tie the horse securely."

"Wait, wait wife ! I did not bring the horse. I exchanged it for a cow."

"Wah ! That is even better. The cow is certainly of greater utility than the horse. The children will now get plenty of cow's milk. Well, children, go and tie our cow."

"Listen, I was to bring the cow, but I exchanged it for a she-goat."

"Why, that is also very good. She-goat's milk is said to have medicinal properties. Its maintenance is no trouble. Well, boys, take charge of the she-goat."

"But listen, I exchanged the she-goat for a cock."

"Not bad !" said Janai with pleasure. "The cock will wake us up early in the morning. Children, take the cock to the backyard."

"Listen, dear ! I had the cock. But as I was very hungry, I sold it for a rupee and purchased some food," said Patil with a smile.

"Fine, very fine," said Janai. "But did you have enough food to eat ? Why do we need a cock ? What matters is your well-being and happiness."

"But you know what happened, dear ? I gave all my food to an old man who came begging to me."

"And you remained hungry ? But it doesn't matter. Indeed it was a kind act. Never turn away a beggar when he comes at your meal time. Now get up, wash your feet and come for your meal. I have been waiting for you since long."

They had a hearty meal and went to bed. Early next morning when Patil got up and opened the door, he was struck by what he saw. He called his wife. In front of their door stood a buffalo, which was not old; a horse not blind, a cow not lame, a she-goat and a cock in sound health. Beside the animals, was lying a leaf with a rupee on it. They were greatly surprised. Then its

meaning slowly dawned on them. His wife stood awe-struck and whispered :

"Do you know who could have done this and why ? The beggar you fed yesterday was..."

"None other than God," said Patil completing her sentence. They bowed their heads in deep reverence.

12

A SISTER'S VOW

IN a village there lived a mother and her daughter. They were very much attached to each other. It so happened once that both of them became pregnant simultaneously. In fullness of time, after nine months were complete, both gave birth to sons. But unfortunately the mother died in child-birth, and while on her deathbed, she called her daughter to her side and said :

"Look after your younger brother as your own son."

The daughter took the mother's last wish to heart. She made a solemn vow to God affirming : "If ever required, I will give up my own son, but I will protect my brother. He will be my real companion for life."

But the husband did not know of her vow. He had different plans. He could not bear to see his wife showing greater love to her brother than her own son. He wished to do away with his wife's brother. But how to say this ? So the wily man thought of a trick to play on his wife. With an innocent face, he suggested to his wife : "Now that God has blessed us with a son, let us go to a temple and make an offering to Him."

The wife said : "All right." She then prepared some *Puranrotis** as an offering for the God and

* Sweetbread—a special Maharashtrian dish.

they set forth for the temple. She tied her son to her breast and her brother on her back. The husband said :

"If we find the river in flood, drop the child you have on your back."

The wife got an inkling of her husband's guile. When they came to the river, she swiftly changed their positions : the brother to the front and the son to her back. When they were midway in the river, the husband shouted :

"Drop the child on your back in the river. I have made a vow to the Goddess for this sacrifice."

She was stunned for a moment. But there was no time to think. She had to keep her word given to her dying mother and the solemn vow she had made before God. She remembered her mother and addressed herself to God : "Let my womb bear fruit again. I will be ever grateful to you." Saying this, she kissed her child and with a hardened heart she released it into the river. Then sobbing and embracing her brother tightly she offered a silent prayer :



"O God, let me have a child again. Let my brother be with me for ever."

All the while the husband thought that his wife had sacrificed her brother to the river. He was happy to be rid of the nuisance.

Day followed day. Years rolled by. Now she was blessed with five handsome, healthy sons. Her joy knew no bounds. Meanwhile, true to the word given to her mother, she brought up her brother with great affection and care.

The brother was now of an age to marry. Out of several offers received from different villages, she selected a suitable girl as a bride for her brother. She clothed her sons with rich garments and her brother in gala attire. The marriage was celebrated with all pomp and show. Bedecked in finery and ornaments, she strutted in the marriage *mandap* with a sense of fulfilment. Now there was a daughter-in-law in the house. The husband was gratified. He gloated over his son, as he thought, and his daughter-in-law. The wife rejoiced to see the brother and sister-in-law living in happiness. But she still kept the secret to herself.

One day while she was grinding jawar on the hand-mill, she started singing *ovis** which speak of a sister's prayer for the love and long life to her brother. The husband, who was nearby, heard them and asked :

"You are singing *ovis* to a brother. But where is the brother ?"

Now she smiled. Now was the time to disclose her secret, she thought. She then asked the husband :

"Whose marriage, do you think we celebrated with such pomp and show ?"

* Couplets in which the folk-songs are usually composed.

"Why, our son's ?"

"No, my brother's," she replied quietly. Then she told him all that had happened. The husband, naturally, did not relish the truth. He was very much upset. But there was nothing he could do but to fret and fume at his wife.

But she did not bother. Later she disclosed the whole story to her brother, who was overwhelmed by his sister's affection for him. But they continued to live happily ever after.

13

DECEPTION GETS ITS DESERT

A Patil had two wives, Subhadra the elder and Sunanda the younger. Subhadra came from a rich family. Apart from her parents, she had four brothers and sisters. But Sunanda had no relations of her own on her mother's side, and no parental home. On important festivals like Diwali and Dassera, Subhadra's brother used to come with a bullock-cart to take her and the Patil to their place. There the daughter and the son-in-law were treated to lavish hospitality. Poor Sunanda had to stay back alone. Where could she go? She had no one.

On one Diwali, Subhadra's brother came as usual to take her and the Patil for the festivities. But the Patil who was somehow irritated, refused to go. So only Subhadra went with her brother.

Now only Sunanda and her husband were left in the house. But the Patil would neither take his meal nor speak a word. After a prolonged entreaty by Sunanda, he at last said: "For this Diwali take me to your parents' place." In great anguish Sunanda replied: "Where can I take you? I have no parental house." But Patil would not budge from his stand and only replied: "You must be having one." The unfortunate Sunanda was in a fix. She did not know what to do.

At last she asked her husband to get the bullock cart ready. When they mounted the cart, the

husband repeatedly asked her: "Which way do we go?" What could unlucky Sunanda say? She started indicating at random any cart track that came in view. The cart was going up one hill and down another. They came to a thick forest where neither human beings nor birds were in sight. Big rivers were running through the jungle canopied by tall trees. By and by they came to a big banyan tree under which there was an ant hill which was a cobra's abode too. When she saw a big hole she thought that if she could put her hand in it and if the cobra bit her, that would be the end of her troubles. She asked her husband to stop the cart for a while. She got down, went to the hole and pushed her hand in as far as it could go. Her hand touched the cobra hood and she felt some sticky fluid clinging to her fingers. The cobra came hissing out of the hole. She was sitting with eyes shut, waiting for the bite. But she opened her eyes when the cobra addressed her: "Daughter, I was suffering from a very painful boil on my hood for a number of days. It burst with the touch of your hand. I am cured. The pain has left me. I will ever be grateful to you. Ask for a boon. I will fulfil it."

She was overjoyed. She said: "I have no relations on my mother's side. I am an orphan. Now you be my father and brother. My husband insists that I take him to my parental home. Where can I take him? I have none. please give me one."

"Daughter," said the cobra, "I will give you a parental home and brothers. But on one condition. You should stay there only for four days and must leave on the fifth day before day-break."

Sunanda nodded her head in agreement.

"Then you go along this track for some distance till you come to a well. There you will meet your

brothers." With this the cobra crept back in the hole.

Sunanda asked the husband to drive the cart as directed by the cobra. Soon they came to a well near which stood a palace and beyond it a tidy town. Sunanda told her husband that this was her home. Hearing the sound of the approaching cart, five people rushed out of the palace to receive them, addressed Sunanda as 'sister' and her husband as 'brother-in-law.' It was all very strange to the Patil. It occurred to him that he had never received such a warm reception at Subhadra's place. The brothers then escorted the sister and brother-in-law into the palace.

Sunanda's sisters-in-law washed her feet with warm water and gave hot scented water for their bath. After the bath they were treated to refreshments.

On *Bhau-Beej* day after Diwali, she performed *arati* and wished well of her brothers when each of them presented her with a gold ornament. Her sisters-in-law showered her with rich clothes. Her father gave her a pearl necklace. After two days, when Sunanda and her husband wanted to return home, they were pressed to stay on for two more days. On the fifth day they left before day-break.

When they had gone a short distance, Sunanda asked the husband to halt the cart. She said that she would go and bring her necklace, which she had forgotten, and return in no time. When she reached the palace, she took the cobra father aside and asked him: "What will I do if my husband asks again to come here for next Diwali?" The cobra told her: "Do not worry, my daughter. Go two miles from here and at the second mile both of you turn back and look. It will solve your problem."

When at the second mile they looked back on the pretext of bidding a final farewell, they saw the palace and the town in grip of a raging fire. In no time it was all turned to ashes.

Soon after reaching home, Subhadra the elder wife also returned from her place. When the Patil with great gusto narrated to her the story of Sunanada's parental home, she was puzzled for she knew that Sunanda had no one. When Subhadra questioned her, the guileless Sunanda told her everything. Subhadra committed to memory all that she had heard from Sunanda.

Days and months passed. Came Diwali, Subhadra urged on her husband to go to her place for Diwali. They mounted the cart and the Patil took the known route to her place. But she forced him to change it and follow the route given by Sunanda.

After travelling for some time in the thick forest, they came to the banyan tree under which she saw the cobra abode. She asked her husband to halt the cart some distance from the spot and wait for her there. She went to the hole and pushed her hand inside. When her hand touched the hood of the cobra, the poisonous reptile rushed out hissing. When he saw her, he knew the deception she wanted to play on him. In anger, the cobra bit her hand and disappeared in the hole.

The Patil found her dead body lying under the banyan tree.

14

THE THOUSAND-KILLER

A man called 'Hazar-Marya' lived in Rajpur town. His only pursuit was to kill one thousand flies every day. Without accomplishing this daily target he would not take his meal. His wife used to scold him and urge him to do some useful work or at least cut some wood for fuel from the nearby forest, but he always turned a deaf ear. He roamed about in the town and forest in search of flies. He would return home for his meal only after he had killed one thousand flies. So, the whole town knew him as *Hazar-Marya*.*

One day a powerful enemy invaded the town. The king became panicky. He called his minister and said: "We have no General, no adequate army no bows and arrows and not even enough elephants and horses. What should we do?" They deliberated over the problem for a long time. Then the minister happened to remember *Hazar-Marya*. He said: "Sir, do not worry. We have one *Hazar-Marya* in our kingdom. Call him and he will take care of the enemy."

The king summoned *Hazar-Marya* and ordered him to be ready for war and face the enemy. As soon as he heard the king's order, he was struck dumb. Because of fright he could not utter a single word. The king lost his temper and

angrily said: "Do as you are ordered or I will chop your head off."

Hazar-Marya started running for his home and the king ran after him. It was as if there was a race between the two.

Hazar-Marya told his wife all that had happened. She was a clever and courageous woman. She told him in the presence of the king: "Do not worry. Take up the challenge. You will be victorious." The king was overjoyed at this. *Hazar-Marya* agreed to do whatever his wife told him. He thought this was better than losing his head at the king's hands.

The following day the king collected an army of sorts and appointed *Hazar-Marya* as its General. With a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows tied to his back, he mounted a horse. But his wife took the precaution of tying him firmly to the horse. She explained: "I have tied you to the horse, so that in your enthusiasm you may not leave the horse and start attacking the enemy on foot." But she actually did this in order to prevent him from leaving the horse and running away. With this preparation the battle started. The two forces stood face to face. The arrows went zooming at each other. The men started falling dead to the ground. *Hazar-Marya's* men ran away from the battlefield in panic. But *Hazar-Marya's* horse had gone berserk and ran like wildfire directly towards the enemy.

In a panic-stricken state he happened to pass through a grove of bamboo trees. He clutched the trees with both the hands so that he could free himself of the horse. But he was so firmly tied to it that he could not come off the horse. Instead the bamboo trees which were by chance old and rotten, were easily uprooted and came in his hands. Thus

* Hazar(Thousand), Marya (Killer).

Hazar-Marya presented a formidable sight to the enemy. He looked like a mighty warrior, with trees in both hands charging at the enemy. The sight put them to fright. The enemies turned back and fled, leaving the battlefield to *Hazar-Marya* and his men.

The king gave him a hero's welcome. He was taken out in a procession on an elephant and rewarded generously in money and kind.

From that day he gave up his pursuit of fly-killing. He listened to his wife and occupied himself in gainful employment. They lived happily thereafter.

15

WHY BIRDS HAVE NO HOMES

KING Risal and his lovely queen ruled over a small kingdom. One day while they were strolling in their garden which was some distance away from the palace, they noticed a pair of birds sitting on the branch of a tree. "What are these birds?" they asked each other. The king said: "They are eagles." "No, they are geese," the queen countered.

They had a long argument over it, yet they could come to no conclusion. Neither would accept the verdict of the other. Finally they laid a wager. The king said in heat: "If these birds are not found to be eagles, then I will roam about into twelve villages collecting rags of cloth, make a garment of them and, wearing it, leave the kingdom."

The queen also said spiritedly: "If these birds are not geese, I will collect rags from twelve villages, sew a *sari* out of them and leave the kingdom."

Next day four servants from the palace, two of them king's and the other two of the queen, set out towards the garden. They were to find out the truth by talking to the birds. The servants asked them:

"Brothers, which bird-order do you belong to?"

The birds replied : "We are geese."

The queen had won. Her servants wended their way in a happy mood, while the king's men went dejected. While on their way, the queen's servants felt very hungry and they found all their food finished. As they could not hold their hunger, they asked for some food from the king's servants. The king's servants said : We are willing to give you our food on one condition. If you tell in the court that the birds were eagles and not geese, you will get everything that we have."

"We will tell as you say," the queen's men replied.

Then all the four went to the king and told him that the birds were eagles.

The king had won. He then asked his wife to fulfil her pledge. The queen, true to her word, left the palace, begged rags from twelve villages, and putting on the *sari* made out of rags, went to stay in the jungle.

Now when she left the palace the queen was pregnant. In fullness of time, a son was born to her. A small child in her hands added more misery to her life in the jungle. But she bore her misfortune bravely.

Thus twelve years passed.

One day a hunter came to their part of the forest. He was very thirsty but he could not find any spring or stream nearby. When he happened to see the queen sitting under a tree he thought it very strange that such a beautiful woman should be staying alone in a jungle. When he asked her to give him some water, she pointed to her hut and said :

"Go to my son. He will give it."

The hunter went to the hut where he met the son and requested him to quench his thirst. But the son said: "We have no one. We live here alone. I will give you water on the condition that you take us with you from here."

The hunter readily agreed because he was a rich zamindar and he already felt pity for the mother and the son.

The son then said some words loudly and struck the ground with his right foot, and a spring gushed out of the earth. The hunter quenched his thirst. He took both of them to his village. When the villagers saw their master accompanied by a beautiful woman and a boy, they said : "The master has brought a fairy from the forest," and they greeted her with great honour.

The zamindar got a new palace built for the queen and her son. But the queen did not live long to enjoy the happy turn of her fortune. She fell ill and while dying, she cursed the birds :

"As you have caused me to be turned out of my home and made me wander from place to place, so you too will never live in houses but wander from place to place."

Since then the birds have no permanent homes and they never rest long at one place. Poor birds who spoke the truth had to carry the curse of the queen while the servants who told lies went unpunished.

Such is the way of the world !

THE RED LOTUS FLOWER

THERE was a large family of Kunbis* in a village. The family comprised of the Kunbi (head of the family), his wife, three sons, three daughters-in-law and the youngest child, a daughter in early teens. With his fields, farms and cattle he was making a satisfactory living. As the father was getting on in years, his eldest son was looking after the affairs of the farms and the family. One day he said to his wife: "Look, since both of us have become old, let us go on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. We will need someone to assist us. So we will take with us the two younger sons and their wives. The eldest son and his wife will take care of the farm and the household. We will leave behind our darling daughter to assist the daughter-in-law." The wife agreed to the proposal though she was rather reluctant to leave her daughter behind. But she had to concede since the eldest daughter-in-law insisted on having someone to help her.

Going on a pilgrimage to distant places was not so easy in those good old days. There were no proper roads nor conveyances. For people in Vidarbha it took about one year for the round trip to a distant place of pilgrimage. On an auspicious day they set out on their journey.

Now the eldest son of the house was a simple soul but his wife was a shrew. While the husband

* Kunbi—Agricultural class in Maharashtra.

was busy the whole day in the fields, the wife would harass the little sister in all possible ways and burden her with arduous household duties. Not content with this, she used to tell all sorts of lies, against the sister, to her husband on his return in the evening. The brother would then abuse his sister and sometimes even thrash her mercilessly. The poor girl had no one to look up to. She bore the ill-treatment in silence.

One day the sister-in-law sent the girl to the tank with a bundle of dirty clothes for washing, saying: "the clothes should not touch a slab of stone, nor water, but they should come back clean." The girl came to the tank and started weeping. She did not know what to do. A washerman heard her weeping and asked her the cause of her sorrow. She weepingly narrated the whole story and asked: "Well, Dhobi Dada, how can I wash the clothes under such conditions?" The washerman took pity on her and washed the clothes clean for her. She then took the bundle and went home.

On another day the sister-in-law sent her to fetch water from the tank. She gave her a pitcher in which she had secretly struck two holes at the bottom. The poor girl would fill the pitcher but the water would gush out through the holes. She started crying helplessly. The frogs in the tank asked her the reason for crying. On hearing her story two small frogs plugged the holes by sitting on them, which enabled her to fill the pitcher and carry it home.

The third time the sister-in-law gave her a counted number of grains of paddy to dehusk into rice. But she told her: "Do not use a pounder. Do not use a mortar. Not a single grain of rice should be less." She went with the basket of grain to a neighbour's courtyard and started weeping. In

the hope of getting some grains, a number of sparrows started frolicking round her. But when they heard her crying and knew the cause, they dehusked the entire paddy with their beaks. But one sparrow, could not resist the temptation of swallowing one grain. She collected the rice and gave it to the brother's wife. On re-counting the sister-in-law found one grain less. She abused the sister and ordered her to bring it back. The girl went to the courtyard again to search for that one grain. The sparrows soon gathered round her and enquired: "What are you searching for?" When she told them, they started making enquiries among themselves and ultimately traced the guilty sparrow. They made it throw up the grain of rice, which the girl picked up and brought home.

Now this sister-in-law was still childless. All sorts of *Mantras*, *poojas*, and rituals were of no avail. One day she went to a village witch for guidance, who prescribed her a ritual: "Put on a *choli* soaked in human blood on a new moon night and at the hour of midnight make twenty-one rounds of the peepal tree near the tank. Do this and you will be blessed with a child."

She felt very happy. She saw dreams of becoming a mother. But how? Where could she get human blood? She taxed her brain for a considerable time and urged upon her husband for the sister's blood. The husband did not like the proposal initially. She nagged him daily. He was a weak man. He also desired a child. Ultimately he succumbed to her pressure.

Next day, on the pretext of taking her to her maternal uncle, he took her to the forest. But as he had some soft corner for the sister in his heart, he could not summon enough courage to kill her. So he killed a cock, soaked his wife's *choli* in the cock's blood and leaving the crying sister in the

forest went home. The wife was overjoyed; but soon a streak of doubt began to trouble her heart. She asked him: "I doubt if you have soaked the *choli* in your sister's blood. Bring me your sister's head to prove you have killed her, otherwise I will drown myself in the tank." The husband felt helpless. He went back to the spot where he found his sister still weeping, killed her and brought the dead sister's head to his wife. He wife could not contain herself for joy. She went twenty-one times round the peepal tree near the tank and threw the sister's head in the tank. Soon the head bloomed into a beautiful red lotus. When some neighbours enquired about the sister she told that she had gone to her maternal aunt's place.

Some days later the pilgrims returned home. After a pilgrimage, it is customary not to return straight to your home but stay on the outskirts for a while. So the party camped by the side of the same tank and sent a message to the villagers about their arrival. All the villagers turned up to give them a welcome. The eldest son and his wife were also there. But the young daughter was nowhere to be seen. When the mother asked, she was told that she was at her maternal aunt's place.

Then every member of the pilgrimage party took bath in the tank. When the father saw the beautiful lotus flower, he went near it to pluck it. But it eluded him by moving from place to place and saying in a soft voice:

"Brother killed sister,
To soak wife's *choli* in blood
Touch me not, Oh father!"
The father was perplexed.

When next the eldest daughter-in-law tried to reach the flower, it darted away and shouted in anger:

"Brother killed sister,
To soak your *choli* in blood
Touch me not, O, wicked woman !"

When the same story was repeated with every member of the family, the mother suspected that there was some foul play. She herself entered the tank and attempted to touch the flower, but it escaped saying :

"Brother killed sister
To soak wife's *choli* in blood
Touch me not, Oh ! my mother."

The mother then asked : "If I am really your mother, why should you fear to come near me ?" At this the lotus slowly came near her. The moment the mother touched the flower there emerged a small figure which gradually transformed itself into the missing daughter. Everyone was astounded.

When the daughter narrated the whole story, the father drove the ungrateful son and his wife out of the house.

17

THE INCOMPARABLE ARCHER

SOON after the coronation of Shivaji as *Chhatrapati*, a capital complex was built at Raigarh with three hundred spacious buildings, a temple to God Jagadeeshwara and a huge tank. The tank, named *Kushavarta*, was full of varieties of lotus plants. It was a quiet evening in the month of Kartik when Shivaji and his mother Jijabai saw the tank abloom with beautiful blue, white and red lotus flowers.

The mother said : "The holy day of *Vaikunta Chaturdashi* is very near, Shivaba."

Shivaji replied : "Yes, Masahib, I have heard that it was on that day that God Vishnu worshipped God Shiva with one thousand lotus flowers. When he fell short by one flower, he made it up by offering one of his eyes."

"It is my desire," said Jijabai, "that I should worship God Jagadeeshwara with a thousand white lotus flowers from our tank on that day." Shivaji assured her that he would see to it.

But Jijabai wondered how it could be done. "It is not as simple as you think. For this *Pooja* I want fresh and pure flowers, not only unsmelt, but also not made impure by the thought of the *Pooja* in the mind of the man who plucks them. But when anyone gathers the flowers, he will be inevitably thinking of the *Pooja* to God. As soon as he touches the flower, he will have unknowingly

offered it to 'Him' in his mind. So what I then get for my *Pooja* will be nothing better than the impure, second-hand flowers already mentally offered."

Shivaji realised the difficulty. It was not possible for his mother at her age to gather a thousand flowers by herself, and if he had to get them plucked by another person, he could not find a way out of the difficulty.

Next day Shivaji summoned his court and confronted them with his mother's wish and her predicament. They heard Shivaji solemnly but none could suggest a solution.

At last a young man rose and said: "Your Majesty, it is my humble request to you to see how I use my skill to gather one thousand white flowers untouched by hand with stems of the same length."

Everyone was curious to know who this rash young Maratha was. Someone in the court identified him as Vikram Dalvi of the Maharaja's personal bodyguard.

Shivaji warned him: "Vikram, you know what you have said. You will have to stand by every claim you have made. Otherwise, there will be heavy punishment."

On the appointed day at sunrise, Vikram came to the tank with a bow and a thousand arrows. Shivaji, his mother and members of the royal family as well as all the courtiers had come out of curiosity to see how Vikram honoured his commitment.

After touching the feet of Jijabai and Shivaji, he laid himself flat on the ground. Then estimating the distance and length of the stem, he started felling white flowers with bow and arrow. One arrow, one flower. His arrows fell like rain. His

concentration was so intense that he was oblivious of everything around him. He was only seeing the exact spot of the stem where the arrow had to pierce it.

When all his one thousand arrows were used up, he went in a boat and picked up all the flowers with a pair of tongs. He also collected all the arrows that were floating on the surface of the tank.

Shivaji acclaimed his performance, but what Jijabai said was more to the point. "Vikram's concentration was so acute," she said, "that he was not aware of anything except a particular point on the stem. Neither thought of *Pooja* nor God could have touched his mind."

Vikram requested Shivaji to check if the flower stems were of the same length. Shivaji asked one of his officers to measure the lengths of the stems. He reported that they were of the same length. Everyone, including Shivaji and Jijabai, were lost in amazement at this wonderful performance.

Shivaji publicly honoured Vikram by placing a gold and emerald necklace round his neck with his own hands.

HOW PARVATIBAI OUTWITTED THE DACOITS

IT happened not very long ago, just in the middle of the last century, when areas on the outskirts of Maharashtra were infested with thugs and dacoits. Bands of these marauders used to raid the villages, terrorise the people and take away their valuables. The police arrangements were very poor. The people had to defend themselves by forming their own resistance groups. But many times they had to flee their homes in order to save their lives.

In a certain area a dacoit-chief had become quite notorious. He held the people residing there in constant terror. From villages he very soon spread his activities to the nearby towns. He had now become so bold that he used to send advance intimation to the people as to when he would raid and which houses he would loot. If an effort was made to remove the valuables from the houses or call the police, the victims had to face more severe reprisals. There was thus no way out but to allow oneself to be plundered or offer whatever resistance one could by mustering men ready to fight. But the dacoits would always succeed at the end.

One day a rich man named Bapurao received word that his house would be attacked that night. He was also given the usual warning : "If you try to deceive by removing the ornaments from your

house or inform the police, you will be given a blood-bath."

Bapurao turned pale when he heard it. He had a big *haveli* of his own and a brigade of servants working in his house. His coffers were full. He was mighty afraid. But his wife Parvatibai was a very courageous and clever woman. When he broke the news to her she asked him : "What do you propose to do ?"

"Surely I am not going to yield to these plunderers ! I will collect men from the town and along with the servants give them a fight. What do you think ?"

"I think there is no use giving an unequal fight. After all the dacoits are better armed, and more accustomed to fighting. They will overpower you in no time."

"But what else can we do ?" asked Bapurao.

"I think we should outwit the dacoits by some strategem," said Parvatibai thoughtfully.

"But how ? Should we hide your jewel-box somewhere...say in the dung-heap in the cattle-shed ?"

"Let me think," she said, "till then you do whatever you think proper. I will fight them in my own way. Don't worry."

Bapurao felt a little reassured and he went about the town in search of men to help him, while Parvatibai sat a long time thinking. Soon the evening advanced. Bapurao came back and told his wife : "I have collected some twenty men. We will hide in the woods near the village-border and attack the dacoits before they can enter the village."

Saying this he took four servants and several weapons and went away.

It was now dark and the whole village seemed to lay silent and expecting.

Parvatibai then called her maidservants and the two cooks and ordered them : "Prepare a royal meal for fifty persons. Time it in such a way that it should be ready to be served hot by about midnight."

The servants were surprised but they went their way and set to work. Parvatibai supervised the preparations. When the meal was almost ready and the plantain-leaves and seats for fifty persons were laid for supper, she put on a new sari, and except the *mangalsutra*, took off all her ornaments and arranged them in a thali along with her other jewelry. She then sat waiting.

When it was midnight she heard the distant noise of horses' hoofs and sabre-rattling. Soon the noise began coming closer and closer. Suddenly there was a loud knock on the door. Her heart almost stopped beating, but the next moment wearing a calm and eager expression on her face, she hurriedly went to the door and opened it. Before her stood a large man with a ferocious look, with a naked sword in his hand. Parvatibai was scared but summoning courage she said sweetly :

"Come in brother. Please do come in."

The dacoit was taken aback by this address. But before he could open his mouth Parvatibai said :

"I have been waiting for you and other brothers since I received your message this morning." The dacoit stood staring at her, surprised at this unusual welcome.

"Please come in. And don't waste time. Wash your hands and feet. The supper is ready. Have a hearty meal before you do your work."

The dacoit-chief was still hesitating. But she made them sit on the seats and ordered the servants to serve them hot food. While they were eating, she personally attended each one and pressed them to eat some more, and not feel shy. When they finished their supper, she brought the plateful of ornaments and placing them before the dacoit-chief told him : "Brother, this is all that I have got, But I have kept back only one piece for myself." She indicated towards the *Mangalsutra* on her neck and said : "It is a sacred marriage-token which I wear for the long life of my husband and I pray that you should spare it."

The dacoit-chief could contain himself no more. With a catch in his voice he said :

"Of course I will spare it. We have eaten your salt and we are never unfaithful to those whose salt we have eaten. What's more, you have called me brother and given me a brother's welcome. From today you are my sister and I will see that no harm comes to you." Saying this he returned the plate of ornaments to her and ordered his fellow-dacoits to bring in her husband who was laying on the roadside along with others tied hand and foot. He then set them free and departed.

Great was the surprise of the villagers when they heard the story next morning. Since then no dacoit attacked Parvatibai's house, and even today the grandmothers of the village tell her story to their grandchildren.

A BHIL STORY OF CREATION

THE Bhil God—Bhagwan—created the earth and on the earth he created two human beings, a male and a female. They lived as brother and sister and were very happy. They were kind and generous to other creatures. The brother used to go out for work, while it fell to the girl's lot to draw water. While going to the river she would take rice with her and feed the fish. This went on for a long time.

So the queen-fish Ro, very pleased with the girl's generosity, one day asked her :

"Maiden, what reward do you desire? If you have thought of anything definite, tell me. I shall fulfil it."

"I have thought of nothing," replied the girl.

So the queen fish told her: "Through water and rain the earth will soon be turned upside down. Ask your brother to make a cage, and keep pumpkin seeds with you. When it begins to rain you and your brother should step into the cage, taking the seeds and water with you. Also do not forget to take a cock with you."

Very soon rains began to fall, slowly at first, then in torrents, as if the heaven and earth had merged together. For days, the brother and sister floated in their cage, taking the seeds, water and the cock with them. At last the rains stopped, the

deluge subsided and they found their cage perched on a rock. Soon their cock crowed.

And they heard Bhagwan speaking: "Thus have I turned the world upside down. But has anyone survived? The crowing of the cock tells me of it."

The Bhagwan himself went to find out. When he saw the cage, he enquired :

"Is anyone inside?"

The girl answered: "We are inside—I and my brother."

Bhagwan found within the cage the young couple in full prime and strength of life. He asked them :

"I have destroyed the whole world. Who warned you of the deluge and gave you advice to make such a cage? You must explain the mystery to me."

The girl replied "It was the fish Ro who instructed me."

Bhagwan called the fish and asked: "Was it you who brought the knowledge to these two?"

"Oh no, Lord Father, not I," protested the fish.

But when Bhagwan beat the fish, she finally confessed: "Yes, Lord Father, I did really do it."

Bhagwan was very angry. He said: "Had you at once confessed the truth, nothing would have happened to you." And saying this he cut off its tongue and threw it in water. Since then the Ro fish have remained without a tongue.

Then Bhagwan looked at the girl and the youth and was pleased with them. He turned the girl's face to the east, the man's to the west. Then he

again made them turn and face each other. Then he asked the man :

“Who is she ?”

The man, when he looked at the girl, was aware of a very strange feeling in his heart. He replied :
“She is my wife.”

“Who is this ?” he asked the girl and she too conscious of a new feeling said :

“He is my husband.”

Then God made them man and wife.

Thus this couple started the human race.

20

GODDESS LAKSHMI'S ROCK

IN the city of Hyderabad there is a shoulder-high piece of massive rock jutting out of the earth. It is commonly known as Lakshmi's rock. In Marathwada, which was formerly a part of Hyderabad State but now in Maharashtra, there is a legend about this rock.

In olden days Hyderabad was known as Vasumati Nagar. At that time Hyderabad, though the capital city of Nizam's dominions, was not such a big city as it now is. But by the standard of those times it was quite a big town. Under the Nizam's benevolent rule the people were happy, particularly in the capital city. Nobody was in want. Even poor people could afford to feast on *puran-poli** and other delicacies on festival days. It was a common belief that Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) was staying in the city as the guardian angel of the dominion.

Later on when sin and evil became rampant, she, in anger, decided to leave the city.

At the site where the present Char Minar stands, there used to be a sentry-post. Everyone had to pass through the post whether going out or coming in. One day the sentry saw a tall and beautiful lady of a noble family coming towards him. She was attired in a Maharashtrian nine-yard green

* *Puran-Poli*—Sweet Cake. Highly prized delicacy in Maharashtra.

sari, green *choli*, with green bangles on her wrists, a big *sindur* mark on her forehead, a pearl nose-ring, and silver anklets on her ankles. The sentry thought this was unusual. He could not understand why a lady of a high family should want to go out of the city alone without any escort. Since it was the king's order that no one should be allowed to leave the city without his permission, the sentry respectfully asked : "Madam, do you want to go out ?" She replied "Yes."

"But no one can leave without the king's permission," said the sentry. "I will go and ask the king. But you must remain here till I return." The lady nodded her assent and said : "Yes, I will," whereupon the sentry left for the palace.

The sentry ran to the king and narrated the story. He sought his permission for the lady's exit. The king was puzzled. He could not make out who the lady could be. He was a very intelligent person. After deep thought he was convinced from the description of the lady that she was none other than Goddess Lakshmi leaving his kingdom.

When the sentry asked again, the king said nothing but chopped his head off with his sword. Everyone in the court was astounded. No one could understand. The poor sentry had committed no fault. Why did the king cut off his head ? One courtier summoned courage and asked the king, whereupon the king explained : "It is Goddess Lakshmi leaving our kingdom. Since she has promised to stay at the sentry-post till the return of the sentry, I made it impossible for him to go back. Had the sentry returned, Lakshmi would have left our kingdom and with her our wealth and prosperity. Gods are true to their words. Lakshmi will be waiting for him at the spot. Let us all go and see for ourselves."

When the king accompanied by his prime minister and noblemen went to the spot they saw the lady waiting there. But as soon as she saw the party approaching, she disappeared into the earth. A big piece of rock shot up in the place where Lakshmi was standing.

This rock, known as Lakshmi's rock still exists and is worshipped.

21

THE CLEVER WIFE

IN a village in Marathwada there lived a brahmin named Gundoba Bhat with his family. After his daily worship of God Vaijnath, it was his practice to feed some individuals. He was a very pious and generous man.

But his wife did not approve of his feeding a person every day. She considered it an unnecessary waste. She calculated that if she could somehow put a stop to it, there would be considerable saving whereby they could become rich. But she could not say openly or do anything against the wishes of her husband.

One day while he was on his way to the Vaijnath shrine, he met a poor brahmin. After making preliminary enquiries, he pressed the poor brahmin to take his meal with him. He said: "You please go to my place. I will be back home in no time after doing the *pooja*." The poor brahmin reached Gundoba's house as directed. The wife naturally got angry when she saw the visitor at the door. But she thought: "Today is a good day since my husband is not home. I must get rid of the unwanted guest by some trick."

Once the guest was inside, she welcomed him and offered him a glass of water. She then feigned weeping and started shedding crocodile tears. When the guest sympathetically asked for the reason the wife said sobbing: "It is my husband's daily practice to bring a guest on the pretext of feeding him.

Then he ties him to a post and thrashes him with a grain-pounder. That is why brahmins avoid our house. That is the reason for my sorrow. But I am helpless. I can say nothing."

The demoralised guest prostrated himself before the lady and begged her to save him. The wife then let him out of the house through the back door.

When Gundoba, on his return enquired about the guest, his wife said: "What a strange person today's guest was. As soon as he came in, he asked me for a grain-pounder and a piece of strong rope. As I was scared by the queer demand, I said no. At this, the fool left the house in towering rage."



Gundoba explained: "Probably he wanted these for some *pooja*. Give me the pounder and the rope. I will go and hand them over to him." He took the articles and started running after the guest. Meanwhile the guest, walking leisurely and wondering about the strange ways of his erstwhile

host, had covered some ground. When he happened to look back, he saw Gundoba running after him with the pounder and the rope in his hands. When Gundoba shouted : "Please wait, I have brought the pounder and rope for you." The frightened guest increased his speed and escaped. Poor Gundoba returned home a sorry man particularly because of the break in his daily practice, but his wife was happy that she had succeeded in her trick.

22

THE STORY OF MANGALA GOURI

AT Aat-Pat-Nagar there was a king. But he had no child. A sadhu used to come for alms to his palace. When the queen used to come to offer alms, he would refuse and walk away saying that he did not accept alms from a childless woman. She told this to the king. The king told her to hide herself behind the door and drop plenty of gold and jewels in his begging bag when he next came for alms. She did as told but when the sadhu discovered the trick played on him, he cursed her that she would never bear a child.

She caught hold of his feet and begged for mercy. He said : "Ask your husband to put on blue garments, and go to the forest riding a blue horse. Dig the place where the horse stumbles. He will discover a Devi's temple there. Ask him to offer prayers to the Devi who will bless you with a child."

He went to the forest as directed by the sadhu and dug the place where the horse stumbled. He found a resplendent temple with a Devi installed.

He sat in penance before the goddess for a long time. Ultimately the goddess was pleased and asked him to ask for a boon. He said that he had everything but he was not blessed with a child.

The goddess said : "You are not destined to have a child. But since you have pleased me with your penance, I will bless you with one. If

you choose a short-lived son he will be endowed with all virtues, a son with long life will be born blind and a daughter, will be a child widow. Now make your choice."

The king asked for the short-lived but virtuous son. The goddess told him: "Behind the temple there is an idol of God Ganesh and behind it a mango tree. Step on the generous belly of the idol, pluck a mango fruit and give it to your wife to eat."

The king did so and his wife in due course gave birth to a son. The king and queen were overjoyed. They performed his thread ceremony when he was eight. At the age of ten, the queen wished her son to be married. But the king said that he had vowed to marry him only after his pilgrimage to Kashi. Soon after, the son accompanied by his maternal uncle set forth for Kashi.

On their way to Kashi, they came to a town where they saw some girls playing. Very soon they began to quarrel among themselves and abuse each other. One of them said to the fair young girl: "You naughty girl, you will be a child widow." The fair girl promptly retorted: "My mother is a devotee of Goddess Mangala Gouri. There never will be a widow in our family. After all I am her daughter."

When the uncle heard this he thought: "If I marry my nephew to this girl, he will be long lived. But how to bring this about?"

The uncle decided to put a halt for the day in the town and lodged themselves in a *dharmashala*. It so happened that the fair girl's wedding was to take place that evening. But somehow the bridegroom and his party failed to arrive. The parents were in a fix. They came to the *dharmashala* in search of a bridegroom where they saw the uncle

and his nephew. They were impressed by the boy. They took him with them and married him to their fair daughter at an auspicious hour the same evening. They were made to sleep in the house of worship near the idols of Shiva and Parvati.

When they had retired for sleep Goddess Mangala Gouri appeared to her in a vision and told her: "Oh my daughter, a serpent will come to bite your husband. Keep some milk ready for the snake to drink and a pot with a narrow mouth nearby. The snake will first drink the milk and creep into the pot. Cover the mouth of the pot with your bodice and tie it down firmly. Make an offering of the pot to your mother in the morning."

She made the necessary arrangements and everything happened as she was told by the goddess. When her boy husband got up, she gave him some sweets to eat. He then gave her his ring and joined his uncle on their onward journey to Kashi.

In the morning, after taking her bath, the girl made an offering of the pot to her mother. When the mother opened the mouth of the pot, she found a precious necklace in it which she placed round her daughter's neck.

At this time, the original bridegroom came to the wedding *mandap* and sent for the bride to play some games which are customary at the wedding. The girl refused to play with the boy saying, 'this is not my husband' as he could not identify the ring. The parents did not know how to find their son-in-law. So they arranged a feast for brahmins in which the girl would wash the feet of the brahmins while wearing the ring. This went on for many days but no brahmin turned up to identify the ring.

Meanwhile, the uncle and nephew reached Kashi where they worshipped the gods, distributed a lot of alms and charity and obtained blessings of the holy brahmins. One day the nephew fell down unconscious, as Yamaduta (messenger of the God of Death) had come to take away his life. But the Goddess Mangala Gouri intervened and fought a grim battle and drove the messenger of Death away. When the nephew regained consciousness, he narrated to his uncle what he thought he had seen as a dream. The uncle said : "It is all for the best. Your misfortune is over. Let us now return home."

On their way home, they came to the same town and camped on the bank of a tank. When they were making preparations to cook their meals, some maid-servants came to them and said: "Please do not take the trouble to cook your own meals. There is a feast on at our master's place. Please go and take your meals there."

They refused saying that as they were back from a pilgrimage to Kashi, they would not accept food cooked by others. When the maid-servants reported this to their mistress, she sent them a palanquin and persuaded them to come to her house. When the daughter bent herself down to wash the feet of the guests she recognised her husband and the nephew identified the ring.

After the meals, the uncle and nephew accompanied by the bride left for their home which they reached in due course of time. The uncle narrated to the king and queen all that they had gone through during their journey. The mother-in-law embraced her daughter-in-law lovingly and said : "You have pulled my son out of the jaws of death." But the daughter-in-law modestly replied : "I have

done nothing. I am a devotee of Goddess Mangala Gouri. It is all Her doing."

It is customary in Maharashtra for newly married girls to worship Goddess Mangala Gouri for five years after their marriage on every Tuesday in the month of *Shravana*. It is a common belief that this ensures domestic happiness in general and long life to the husbands in particular.

THE UNWANTED WIFE

IN a town on the sea-coast of Gomantak, there lived a merchant who had two wives. One was his favourite. The other was unwanted. The unwanted one had a small hut on the outskirts of the town while the favourite had her palatial residence in the heart of the town.

The merchant used to go abroad every few months in a ship in pursuit of his business. Before going abroad, he used to dole out to his unwanted wife a few measures of grain, while his favourite spouse was left in command of the sumptuously provided mansion. It was the usual practice of the favourite to deride, ridicule, and even abuse the other wife. But the unwanted woman was endowed with considerable pluck and strength of mind. She used to clean and grind the corn on the *chakki* with her own hands. Out of the flour thus ground she would make *bhakris*.* Out of these, she would make an offering to the Sun-God, then to the sacred Tulsi plant, then a portion she would feed to her cow and dog. She herself would eat last with contentment whatever was left over. If a guest or a beggar happened to come by she would feed him too, sometimes herself going without food.

But the ways of the favourite wife were quite the contrary. No guest or visitor could ever enter her door. The usual reception for the dog

* *Bhakri*—Thick coarse bread made of the flour of jawar or bajra.

was a stick. The left-overs of her lavish meals were passed over to the temple as offerings.

Once it came to pass that when the merchant went in his ship on the open seas, the sea turned stormy and his ship began to sink. The merchant was in great panic. He brought to his mind the names of his pious father and mother, but it was of no avail. Then he conjured up the name of his favourite wife and wished in his mind: "Let the ship come up." But the ship sank deeper. Then in sheer desperation he took the name of his unwanted wife, and Lo! the ship surfaced. His unwanted wife's piety and love had saved him from the disaster. He now realised her true worth.

When he returned home, he first went to his favourite wife. He asked her: "What acts of piety have you done in my absence?" She smiled and told him all sorts of false tales. "I fed the guests with fresh meals cooked by me. I fed the stray cows and dogs with love and affection. I made offerings to God." The merchant apparently took it as truth and forgot all about the incident. When he went on another voyage the same thing happened again. It now made him think. He recalled how his unwanted wife's name saved his ship. So he went to her hut and watched her from a hiding-place. He saw her making *bhakris* and stood there watching what was passing. Her first visitors were the Sun-God and the Tulsi Goddess to whom she offered *pooja*, sought their blessings for the long life of her husband and served them their portion of food. She then fed her cow and dog tenderly. In the meantime a beggar happened to come to whom she gave alms with a joyous heart. The merchant was deeply impressed. He came out of his hiding-place and stood before her, when she was about to make a meal of whatever was left. When she saw her husband she was overjoyed. She left her thali aside, washed her husband's feet, sat him on the

wooden seat, drew *rangoli* round his *thali*, burnt an incense-stick and then served him respectfully her own food. She herself went without food that day.

The merchant was overwhelmed by her piety. He took her out of the hut and seating her on his elephant, marched in a procession to the town. He heard people standing on both sides of the road saying : "She is a real pious woman." They then presented her rubies, pearls and gold coins and grain, whatever they had.

When the favourite wife came to know of this she rushed to the scene and hurled abuses at the merchant. The merchant could contain his anger no longer, so he cut her nose and ears, took her out in a procession on a donkey and drove her out of his house. But the other wife took her to her house and nursed her to health with great care and affection. She told her husband :

"In my house, love and affection will reign."

She reaped the reward of her good deeds and lived happily thereafter.

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THE FEAR OF DEATH

It was a fishermen's village. Many fishermen's families were living there, building bamboo huts in the green verdure of the seacoast, since when no one knew, perhaps since ages, as all that they could remember was that their fathers and before them their grandfathers and great grandfathers were living there.

Everyday they would put their boats to sea when streaks of red still lingered in the evening sky, and sail into the purple-red sea till it turned black. Then they would fling their nets wide into the sea and sit and wait singing songs they had heard their fathers sing, till the red to the morning appeared in the sky. Then they would draw their nets in and sail back home.

They worked very hard and risked their lives for catching fish to feed the villages in the vicinity and the towns nearby.

Sometimes they would go far into the sea to explore new waters. Some boats would founder on the rock and someone would be drowned. Sometimes they would be caught in a storm and get lost in the sea. Then there used to be weeping and wailing over the dead in their huts. A sadness would fill their hearts, but not for long. The wide expanse of the sea would stir their blood. For them it was the irresistible call of the sea and they would set sail again.

Thus Antonio one day lost his father. His fellow-fishermen went to his house and told Antonio's mother that his father's boat had capsized in the raging sea and he was drowned; but they had somehow managed to bring his boat back to the beach.

Antonio and his mother wept bitterly for his father for a long while but the next day he gave the boat to the boat-menders and within a week the boat was ready again.

In the evening when he was going to the market for purchasing a new net, he met the landlord's son. Antonio knew the landlord's son well and they would always converse whenever they met. The landlord's son asked Antonio: "What, are you purchasing a net?"

"Yes. Tomorrow I am going in my repaired boat to catch fish. Are you coming?"

"What? In the sea? Not me, I am scared."

"Scared? Scared of what?"

"Scared of the sea, of course. I heard your father was drowned in the sea only last week."

"So what?"

"Then aren't you scared?"

"Why should I? I am a fisherman's son. Fishermen are not afraid of the sea."

"Now tell me, what was your grandfather?"

"He was also a fisherman."

"How did he die?"

"He was caught in a storm and never came back."

"And his father?" The landlord's son asked in surprise.

"He also died at sea. But he was more adventurous. He went beyond Colombo to the

east coast of the country and became a pearl-diver. He was drowned. He went in and never came up."

"Strange! What sort of people are you? You always die at sea and yet go to it again and again!" The landlord's son exclaimed.

Now it was Antonio's turn to riddle the other fellow. After scratching his head for a while he asked:

"I hear your grandfather passed away recently. Where did he die?"

"He died in his sleep at the house. He was old. When the servant went to wake him up he found him dead."

"And your great grandfather?"

"He was also too old and died in his house of illness."

"And his father?"

"I am told he had been ill for a long time and died at the house."

"My God! They all died in the house. Even then you stay in the same house. Aren't you afraid of the house?"

The face of the landlord's son was a sight to see.

THE WONDER BOY

THIS is an old tale which has passed by word of mouth for generations in Goa.

An old well-to-do couple lived in a mansion situated near a rippling playground of water surrounded by jungle and arecanut and coconut palm groves. The daughters of the family were married and the sons had drifted to distant lands to earn their livelihood. The old man spent most of his time in gossip at the *taverna*. But the old woman was simply bored by her loneliness. It was on rare occasions that she had her husband for company in the evening.

It was on one such evening, while they were sitting in the balcony sipping *feni* (the famous drink of Goa) and talking of this and that, in the fading light of the evening that they caught a glimpse of the boy peeping through the wooden bars of the gate. Even in the poor light the old lady could make out the boy's short, plump stature, brownish yellow complexion and pleasant face. He would be a good company, the old woman thought. So she hailed him and asked who he was. She had never seen him before. Was he from the other side of the river? He gave such a long-winded and disjointed story that it was impossible to make head or tail of it. Was he an orphan who hadn't anything to eat for days together, though he looked so plump and well-fed, or was he a victim of a cruel stepmother? That apart, she

was so charmed by his demeanour that she ended by asking him if he would like to stay with them. To this he readily agreed. She even forgot to ask him what type of work he could do. All she was interested in was to have a son and a servant, someone in the house, to relieve her of her loneliness. Now she did not care if her husband went out whenever and wherever he liked.

He said his name was Tinku. Was it a Hindu name? He never identified his caste nor religion. But he so pleased his new masters by his hard work and ability to handle anything entrusted to him that they never asked him, not even when he absented himself from the family Rosary. Every evening when they assembled for the Rosary, the banging of the back-door was a signal that Tinku was out. The old couple felt hurt, no doubt, but they said nothing as the boy was really a windfall—a real Godsend. He cost them nothing but his food, of which he ate so little like a bird. And he was like a demon for work. They were so hypnotised by his skill and adroitness that it never occurred to them to ask any question even to themselves, let alone the boy.

Ask him for firewood and there it was piled near the fire-place in a trice without your having even heard the working of the axe splitting the logs. If they asked him to fetch fish from the market, which was more than a mile away, it was there properly dressed in the kitchen, before they were half-way through the Rosary. They wondered. But they explained it away by saying that perhaps the distance appeared too long for their old, tired feet.

And for the old lady Tinku was full of pranks and mischiefs like a monkey. She had never seen a boy like him, not even one of her own sons who had died at the age of ten and was known as the

naughtiest boy in the locality. When her husband grumbled at his pranks, she asked : "What do you expect of a boy so full of life ? Loll in the verandah and puff away at his cigarettes the whole day long?" Naughtier Tinku was better company. She felt as if she was twenty years younger.

One day the old lady sent Tinku with a message to her daughter in another village, who had just given birth to a baby. With no means of modern transport the two-way journey took at least two to three days. But the boy who had left in the morning was back well before nightfall, looking as fresh as ever. An incredible feat ! Did he travel on wings ? Or was it one of his usual pranks ? Did he really visit the daughter or was he lazing about somewhere chain-smoking all the while ? But they could not deny the proof which he had brought with him—the reply from their daughter.

Some months rolled by and the daughter came to visit her parents for the village feast. With her came her children, a boy and a girl aged about ten, besides the new-born baby. With his tricks and pranks, Tinku soon became the favourite of the children. In spite of this, there was no slackening of his household chores. He would entertain the children with his magic tricks. He would go in a dark room and glow like a man on fire : his eyes would appear to become big shining balls with an unearthly radiance. Once he picked up the baby and threw it up and the baby simply vanished—or so it seemed to the children.

But the daughter did not like these sinister tricks—though she did not say anything to her mother as she did not want to hurt her feelings, seeing that the boy was a great favourite in the house. The children all the while grew fonder and fonder of Tinku. But one day the granddaughter

noticed that Tinku was absent from the evening Rosary. Being a pious girl, she thought it odd. So the next day the girl with her brother tried to drag him to the prayer room. But he refused to yield. They rolled over him, dragged him by his hands and feet but with all their might they could not move him an inch. He seemed to weigh tons, as if rooted to the earth like a rock. But the daughter, when she heard this, did not like it at all. She saw something sinister in all this. In fact she had never taken to the boy from the very first day.

Next morning she quietly slipped away to the church on the pretext of attending Mass, though her real intention was to consult the priest. She told him all that she had heard and seen. The priest thought for some time and resolved to act.

Armed with holy water and some books, the priest came to the house in the evening. At the very sight of the priest Tinku seemed to cower; he drooped and turned pale. When the priest chanting his prayers, sprinkled Tinku with holy water, the boy with a shriek of agony burst into flames and vanished into thin air, leaving behind the offensive odour of burning sulphur.

The poor old lady could not be consoled for the loss of her companion. She burst into tears, clasping her hands in anguish.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Choli</i>	A close-fitting blouse.
<i>Digvijaya</i>	Conquest of the world.
<i>Ekadashi</i>	Eleventh day of the Hindu Calender month of the bright and dark fortnight, generally observed as a day of fasting.
<i>Kumkum</i>	Vermilion powder.
<i>Lakshmi</i>	Goddess of Wealth.
<i>Mahesha</i>	One of the names of Lord Shiva.
<i>Mangesha</i>	One of the names of Lord Shiva.
<i>Mangala Gouri</i>	Goddess of wealth and well-being worshipped on Tuesdays in the month of Shravan.
<i>Pavanadeva</i>	The Wind-God.
<i>Pola</i>	A festival of bullocks in which they are worshipped and taken out in procession. A festival of the farmers.
<i>Prasadam</i>	Offering to God which is distributed among the devotees.
<i>Pooja</i>	Worship.
<i>Reredos</i>	Ornamental screen behind an altar.
<i>Taverna</i>	Bar or pub.
<i>Vithoba</i>	A favourite deity in Maharashtra, supposed to be an incarnation of Vishnu.
<i>Vrata</i>	Worship and ritual.

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